

The Lived Experience of Urban African American Pastors As it Relates to Gun Violence:


A Study of Five Blocks in Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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the Doctor of Theology program
Kairos Theological Seminary

CERTIFICATION PAGE

Certified, that the work contained herein is my own, except where noted and cited.

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Krystl D. Gauld


April 19, 2023

Certified, that the work contained herein has been conducted ethically, within the parameters of the institutional review process, to the best of our knowledge, and is appropriate for fulfilling the objectives of the Doctor of Theology dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the lived experiences of seven African American pastors in Germantown, Philadelphia who are facing the current surge of gun violence. The Phenomenological Study examines their personal accounts and uncovers a need for improved mental health and self-care, solace, practical support, and relevant training to support their engagement in gun violence work. Pastors serving marginalized communities deal with the lack of personal and institutional resources when faced with the overwhelming challenge of gun violence. Further findings brought forth the dynamics of resilience, reliance with God, and structural racism with regards to how they impact pastoral experiences and make pastors reluctant to seek for help. The study closes with recommendations regarding new outlooks on the role of the Urban Black Pastor and new possibilities for new partnerships and methods for increasing physical safety in urban communities.

KEY WORDS: Black Pastor, Co-Victims, Gun Violence, Mental Health, Racism, Resiliency, Survivors, Urban Ministry

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2021, eight predominantly black Christian churches sat within five blocks of Germantown in Upper Northwest Philadelphia. Along with those churches are a Masjid (Muslim house of worship) and parish houses. Despite the strong presence of religious institutions, this area remains a gun violence hot spot per the Office of the Controllers' *Gun Violence Crisis Map* (Rhynhart, 2021). The interesting intersection between the abundant presence of churches and extreme instances of violent crime—not just gun violence—creates a curiosity regarding cleric responsibility. Where are church leaders *missionally* in response to gun violence? Most importantly, where are they emotionally in their unique pastoral journeys given recent experiences of navigate the challenges of this unprecedented surge of gun violence in their city?

Like Philadelphia, there are urban areas across the nation such as Chicago, Baltimore, and the District of Columbia where African American pastors are serving congregations and communities suffering from the devastating impact of this surge. This study of African American pastors in Philadelphia offers first-hand accounts and a look into the lives of urban Black pastors dealing with gun violence—a study which is extremely rare. Such a study could be the beginning steps to research needed to assist the Christian Church in addressing gun violence through the Black congregations that are currently serving urban communities that have been impacted the most.

Tragedies, Text Messages, and Three Churches

The following first-hand account by a Germantown pastor provides background on urban gun violence and has particularized the experience to Philadelphia:

“Hey, Krystl!” Lindsey Smith (pseudonym) texts one night at 8:22 PM (L. Smith, personal communication, October 14, 2021). She is the co-leader of a Philadelphia mission. Although her husband is a Caucasian pastor serving a white-collar community, they have planted their family and ministry inside of a parish home in Germantown. Because I worked next door, we were neighbors and Lindsey treated me as such. This means that our working relationship extended beyond typical business hours.

Lindsey and her husband, Allen (pseudonym), are among the community’s first responders. Since actively joining the community several years ago, they have gained the reputation of bringing our neighbors’ problems to a resolve by sticking by each of them and seeing their issue through to resolution. During the time that this text messaging exchange occurred, there they were, late at night, facilitating the care of an elderly homeless woman who was the victim of a hit and run accident earlier that evening. And so, Lindsey’s message continues, “I just want to give you an update on our neighbor” (L. Smith, personal communication, October 14, 2021).

Beside Lindsey and Allen, three nearby Black Churches line the same side of their street. It is a busy area. Less than a half a mile away the street leads to a slowly gentrifying downtown shopping area. Even closer, there are quite a few schools. Within the five blocks, there are various businesses, one shopping center, and a park. The street the Smith’s live on has exemplary components of a healthy community infrastructure. It could serve as a template for a thriving community since it has influential leaders who are helping fulfill needs, businesses that provide

jobs and boost revenue locally, and social spaces from barbershops to coffee shops and religious centers to academic institutions for people to connect with one another. Yet, due to the limitations in access and availability of needed support—specifically measures that ensure community safety and crackdowns on violent crime there is a breakdown—with time and like many other parts of the city, this Germantown neighborhood has fallen into despair and disrepair. Fortunately, Lindsey and Allen are there.

As neighbors, they are fully present with the people they serve in the community, suffering with and supporting them through difficulty, devastation, and the violent events that impact that part of Germantown. Sometimes their presence takes the form of provision—promoting the search for a missing child that has been abducted during a carjacking on social media and in person, opening up their family home as a safe haven to children in the community, or creating a place of rest and a hot meal for neighbors hanging out nearby. Other times, it has looked like social services and advocacy. For a time, they would invite me in as a resource to connect me with someone in the community in need of the social work or homelessness services I provided and would hold conversations with me through the gate we shared to keep me updated regarding the neighborhood happenings occurring after I went home for the day.

My friendship with Lindsey and Allen afforded me the opportunity to witness the depths of their ministry and what it means to be fully present and immersed in the culture of the community. Still, I was not fully aware of what it cost a pastor, such as Allen (and the neighboring leaders of the three churches who share in the work of the community beside him), to be fully present with others in the face of calamity until I received a real-time report regarding a fatal drive-by shooting that occurred on Thursday, August 19 at 5:30 PM directly in front of

their home and my agency. Just that morning, Allen and I spent the day joking and exchanging text messages—making ministry plans and discussing other projects. Within four hours, I would receive another text, briefly explaining that directly in front of where we live and work were the scenes of a drive-by shooting that claimed the life of a young male. “Pray for us, and gtown,” the message read, “there was just a drive by in front of the house, someone’s face was blown off, blood everywhere and obviously a lot of tension and anxiety in the air” (A. Smith, personal communication, August 19, 2021).

As usual, Allen sent a brief report and jumped back into action. Texted updates typically follow up on after hour events. However, that did not happen this time around; there was radio silence. Although I did not hear from Allen early the next day, things went as usual following the night of a shooting. The Philadelphia Anti-Drug & Anti-Violence Network posted up on the block and lined our sidewalks for most of the day. A man with a megaphone—that someone identified to be a pastor—walked up and down the middle of the street, disrupting traffic just as the recent event had disrupted our lives, and preached about an end to gun violence. Having not yet heard from Allen, I checked in via text. Although text messages confine full expression, the responses Allen shared were like no other message I had ever received from him. As honestly and vividly as he could remember, he offered what it was like to be in the moment, providing gross details and reactions. Allen did not limit his response solely to his actions as a present minister; he also shared his reactions as a neighbor, a father, and a man that had just witnessed unspeakable violence.

Through the exchange of text messages and a phone call, Allen took the opportunity to share a perspective of an experience that often goes unheard. My inquiry created an

informational and therapeutic outlet for Allen allowing him to share perceptions and make meaning of the experience through patterns that embodied the gestalt of the phenomenon (Papp et al., 2003). Unfortunately, Allen's story does not end there. The surge of gun violence continues in Philadelphia; the August 19 shooting was not an isolated or one-time event. As reported by the three African American senior pastors serving the churches near Allen (See Chapter 4), it was the onset of a series of drive-by shootings that would occur within 45 days. Those few blocks in Germantown would experience two additional drive-by shootings *on Sundays*. Hence, the exchange with Allen—that barely scraped the surface of lived pastoral experiences as it relates to urban crime and gun violence—prompted this inquiry into the experiences of urban grief and Black pastoral ministry.

The Problem Statement and Its Significance

Despite the continuous surge of gun violence in Philadelphia, research into the lived experience of primary responders, particularly African American pastors, has been scant. There's research findings regarding stress relative to an overall pastoral experience. However, there is a need for more studies that focus on the stress levels and mental health impact of urban clergy serving communities affected by gun violence. Further, there are general self-care tips and best practices for clergy responding to gun violence in their communities. Although most tips and practices have theoretical and clinical grounding or come from clergy seasoned in urban ministry, there needs to be more exploration or studies of what it is like for an urban minister living out these practices amidst increasing rates of gun violence in their communities.

The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions: 1) What is the lived experience of an urban African American pastor serving Philadelphia during the surge of gun violence? and 2) How are Black Pastors facing the surge of gun violence in Philadelphia? Religious leaders are not just preaching in the face of death; they are pastoring congregations that they let out of Sunday service and into the crossfire of drive-by shootings. Quite often, pastors recount the same sad tale of baptizing teen boys on Sunday and share in similar experiences of receiving calls to funeralize those same youth before week's end (Malachi, 2013).

In response to lethal gun violence, urban African American pastors have been among first responders, present to comfort families, in the streets trying preventive measures, petitioning at the polls for change, preaching messages about peace from their pulpits, participating in funerals, and promoting anti-violence programs from their platforms. In an urban area such as Philadelphia, which has several impoverished communities with disadvantages spanning from the education system to health care system, the crime rate is much higher and the resources are few and far between. Consequently, this correlates to the high demand for urban pastors to respond to shooting deaths, provide death care, and lead in the funeral planning for loved ones of gunshot or violent crime victims.

Despite the high demand, the presence and involvement of pastors remains consistent but at what cost? Not having this information about their experience is a problem, simply because, "shouldn't we be curious?" Although we can read stories and news reports about gun violence, we may not be able to live out these experiences or gain a sufficiently informed perspective that leads to effective resolutions. This creates a critical need to hear from church leaders. Their first-

hand accounts matter and such studies of these kinds of experiences can serve as a gateway to further exploration.

Current literature is helpful in identifying the work and roles of urban African American pastors. It has also uncovered the street codes and systems that detail how urban communities' work. Still, there is a need to understand the pastors living out these codes and working within area systems. If the universal church—and even field leaders of sociology and criminology—would like to address gun violence in cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, and Baltimore, it needs to understand the clergy who are working in the trenches of the actual places where surges of gun-related deaths are happening.

Conceptual Framework

A phenomenon is an event or an experience, and a researcher uncovers a phenomenon through a study. This phenomenological study is ideal for exploring the question of lived experience because qualitative studies help researchers begin to fully understand human experiences in ways that are not quantifiable. I am studying the lived experience related to gun violence in the Germantown Section of Philadelphia and bringing in urban African American pastors as co-researchers to gain insight through accounts of their experiences. Traumatic events are experienced as individual, collective and cultural phenomenon per the findings of sociologists, psychologists, and other scholars (Armstrong & Carlson, 2019). Therefore, my intent is to bring together the data from each co-researcher's unique account to develop a cohesive description of the lived experience—the essence of the urban Black pastor's experience.

Phenomenological studies “describe the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 57). Concepts and phenomena to identify the essence of a group of individuals’ shared experience were explicated during the study. This was acquired through either a descriptive (when Husserl’s approach is applied) or interpretive (when Heidegger’s approach is applied) method. The Husserl’s applied approach was used, making this a descriptive phenomenological study.

Edmund Husserl founded phenomenology as a philosophical movement in the early 20th century. Researchers bracket their biases when using Husserl’s method. This required me to temporarily suspend any advanced or perceived knowledge of a phenomenon in order to gain an unadulterated understanding of an individual’s experience, using solely the data shared by each co-researcher. I took a genuine interest in how an individual’s consciousness perceives their description of an object or an event for this applied approach to be effective (Peoples, 2021).

Here are some examples of objects or events as it relates to gun violence: witnessing an incident of gun violence, comforting individuals and families after a shooting, responding to community outcries, experiencing the scenery of a memorial or vigil, and advocating for an end to gun violence in one’s community. During the study or inquiry into the experience, I was curious about what each co-researcher has experienced and how they experienced it (Moustaka, 1994). A composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals is developed after I collected and explicated data from those who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Summary of Methodology

Seven African American pastors (co-researchers) serving the Germantown section of Philadelphia have been selected to participate in the study. The co-researchers work within a shared five-block radius (area of interest) to capture different perceptions and experiences from the same events and area occurrences. Data was collected and recorded through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews via Zoom video conferencing software. The pastors reflected on the phenomena of gun violence through rich in-depth conversations, which were taped, transcribed verbatim using Trint software, and later explicated through a coding method. DeDoose, a coding software, was the primary tool used to uncover common themes and identify meaning units for the study. The explicated data (co-researchers' descriptions and the meanings embedded in the interview responses) was used to understand and explain the phenomenon in a cohesive description.

Summary of Themes

Brokenness, Calling, Expectation, and fifty-seven other themes emerged from the in-depth interviews, and they were grouped into eight groups or meaning units. All themes appear in Chapter 4, Tables 2 – 9 and 11. These units began to piece together the essence of each participant's lived experience. Capturing the essence of an individual's experience regarding a phenomenon relied on my co-researching relationship with each pastor. While I served as an instrument for collecting data. The interviewed pastors are referred to as co-researchers because they are sharing in the work that helps generate knowledge and uncover the phenomenon.

This was accomplished through dialogue. They processed the phenomenon by sincerely and honestly sharing their awareness of past events and processing the experiences using present

realities (Peoples, 2021). I then situated the themes (meaning units) to create general narratives related to the research questions. These narratives were then used to create a general description of the lived experiences of pastors amid gun violence. A feedback process validated the general description along with the themes.

Limitations

There were two significant limitations to the study. The first limitation being, as mentioned above, the lack of previous research on the topic. The second limitation was participation. Research recommends a sample size which is “typically between 8 to 15 participants” (Peoples, 2021, p. 49). However, pastors within the area of interest were inaccessible due to the impact of COVID-19 and schedule conflicts which limited participation. The study was limited to African American church leaders of protestant faith.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

-Jesus, to the Church of Philadelphia (Revelations 3:8)

A Letter to The Church of Philadelphia

In the Book of Revelation, letters authored by John, the apostle, were sent to the angels of seven churches on behalf of the universal churches' risen savior, Jesus Christ. The interpretation of the texts suggests that these letters are directed to primary leaders or persons with authority to manage correspondence on the each of the seven church's behalf, according to Biblical scholars and historians (Beale, 2013; Vine, 1990). The Book of Revelation presents the Church of Philadelphia as the sixth church of the apocalypse to receive a letter from the apostle, John. The Church of Philadelphia was considered the weakest among the others, facing fearsome opposition, theological heresy, and hostility (Ngundu, 2010). The church served the local area of Philadelphia, which was within the areas of Asia Minor and what is, modernly, known as the country of Turkey. Still, Jesus' words seem appropriately encouraging to the pastors of present-day Philadelphia, Pennsylvania as it combats the surge of gun violence.

Jesus' letter to the Church of Philadelphia—free of rebuke to the weary, weak, and tired “Angel”—offered hope for an inescapable difficulty. Although the chief leaders would have to face their issues head-on, they were afforded the reminder that Jesus is the key and dually, in their situation, the keyholder, providing an open door—a divine resolution to their problem—that could not be shuttered. Similarly, in the city of Philadelphia, pastors are charged with preaching the gospel and doing good in the face of the city's surge of fatal gun violence. God has created

an opening and an opportunity to do so despite gun control fatigue, the overwhelming reports of gun violence, and their own experiences of gun-related homicides and deaths.

Philadelphia is an urban southeastern city in Pennsylvania. It is one of the first and oldest cities in the United States having been established in the English Crown Province of Pennsylvania in 1682 by William Penn. It was once the largest city in the United States and formerly served as the nation's capital, twice. The City of Philadelphia abounds in churches. In quite a few areas, churches face one another at street cross-sections or line up one next to the other along a city block. Interestingly, the areas clustered with Christian houses of worship are not exempt from the current surge of gun violence. There seem to be no sacred places in the community given the rate of homicides increasing from one person a day to 1.5 persons a day during the pandemic which began in March 2020 (Cole, 2022).

The people living next door to churches, in the neighborhood or nearby, or on the blocks they share with churches have also fallen victim to the plethora of violence that plagues the city. This creates a critical question: How are the “angels” of the Church of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania handling the surge of gun violence in their city? The church's role and the pastoral response to these never-ending episodes of gun violence is often called into question amid the public outcry. How are they facing the community cries that can, quite often, be heard from their church steps or the pews? Likewise, where are they reacting—privately, from the pulpit, in political arenas, or through public platforms and the press?

This review of existing related literature seeks to explore what it means to be a Black pastor during the surge of gun violence, starting with an exploration of surges in occurring in cities across the nation. This chapter will be particularized to the city of Philadelphia, reviewing

the history of Germantown, a section of the city that has been greatly impacted by violence, and focusing on three fields of community aid—theology, criminology, and sociology—in response. The second part of this section will provide literature relevant to the lived experience of urban African American pastors and dive deeply into the professional lives of clergy regarding their experiences with city gun violence. Part three will focus on the personal lives of clergy and present a wide focus on trauma and how pastors relate to it. Lastly, opportunities for urban Black pastors to experience healing and transformation related to gun violence will be explored.

Calamity in United States Cities

Calamity, according to Merriam-Webster, defines an event as disastrous, marked by great loss and lasting distress and suffering (Merriam-Webster, 2022). A series of never-ending events of fatal gun violence has left urban cities in a state of deep distress and misery. Gun violence is one of the boldest and loudest killers of urban communities in comparison to the silent killers—limited social, economic, and educational support and opportunities—that are willfully ignored. Recent surges in urban cities across the nation have prompted a national crisis of inequity since greater losses are experienced among young, Black, urban men (Buchanan, 2011; McClintock, 2019; The Children's Defense Fund, 2022). In 2020, gun-related fatalities for African Americans increased to 39.5% (4.5% higher than the national average) with African American males between the ages 15 and 34 accounting for 38% of all gun-related deaths in United States. (Person & Trotta, 2022; Sandy Hook Promise, 2022). Further, peer-to-peer homicide remains the leading cause of death in young Black males, beating out suicide (the third leading cause) and police-related shootings (sixth) (Kennard, 2022; Knapp, 2020).

District Attorneys have created task forces to help implement strategies for reducing gun violence. Law Enforcement's top leadership has leveraged evidence-based, targeted policing strategies with mental health provider support. City leaders, such as Mayors Lori Lightfoot of Chicago, Illinois, Eric Adams of New York City, New York, and Thaddeus Kirkland of Chester, Pennsylvania, have presented blueprints with the pledge to take aggressive steps to end violence in their city. In part, these mayoral plans pressure federal government leaders for support and assistance in regulating gun violence. For instance, on April 12, 2022, Mayor Eric Adams, a former Captain of Police, used his public platform on CNN news to urge a national response, specifically, a law that makes ghost guns illegal (Clemons, 2022). Mayor Adams has since been working publicly and directly with President Joe Biden to conduct plans that increase police presence in high-crime areas, prioritize youth development, and incorporate mental health and behavioral support.

Pushing the responsibility up the federal ladder for resolve may not be a sufficient solution, however. Professor and Historian, Dr. Mark Draper, explains that it astonished him to live in Chicago during Obama's presidency, knowing that the President had lived there and that his wife, Michelle, had family there presently. Although the president owned a brownstone house in a wealthier part of the city by the University of Chicago, Dr. Draper described "only a couple of blocks away" as a shooting gallery. "I could never get my head around, 'How can you be the president,'" Dr. Draper shared, "'And this is your neighborhood?'" He reasons that a president like George W. Bush, living down in Texas, might not fully understand what is going on in Chicago. However, President Obama "has walked these streets. His family still lives there, and the city never got better" (M. Draper, personal communication, May 23, 2022). Gun violence is

still an insidious problem for even the leader of the free world. Draper concludes, “[Obama] can’t address the issue in his own neighborhood.” Similarly, another violent crime occurred within the city within an hour of Mayor Eric Adams, a long-standing New York resident, vowing at a press conference on July 17, 2022, “to turn this crime thing around.”

The news media reported twelve shootings and two stabbings across the five boroughs of the city shortly after the press conference, and by the end of the night, there were two fatalities. Victims were as young as a 13-year-old and up to adults in their seventieth year of age. New York reports midway through 2022 showed that the city’s crime was already 30% higher than it was the prior year. Individual community members—criminologists, community action agencies, and even congregations—joined in to respond to the cries of the community as well, although they, too, suffered with the people in their calamity. Urban cities remain subdued by the crisis of gun violence, and blood from victims continues to stain city streets. That summons another question, “Why—despite coordinated efforts—can’t we curb gun violence?” This section will focus on on-going acts of gun violence as the culprits to urban community grief. With urban communities serving as the primary geographic subject area, this section will also present gun violence through the lens of a social determinant of health.

The Culprit

Gun violence is an act of violence committed with the use of a firearm. Such acts are considered intentional, accidental, or unintentional causes of injury or death, and are not limited to homicide and related-attempts, suicide and related-attempts, and assault with the use of a firearm (Buchanan, 2011; Gusterson, 2013). A gun-related event can range from battery to accidental fatalities, suicide, and murder. Not all acts of gun violence are criminal. However, for

the sake of this study, the focus is criminal acts of gun violence in urban areas, particularly Philadelphia, which lead to death. Buchanan (2011) mostly defines a victim as someone fatally wounded. She adds that says a gun violence victim can be anyone affected by a gun-related event (Buchanan, 2011). Hence, the terms co-victim, second-hand victim, and witness. Survivors were those personally injured, intimidated, brutalized, and mentally scarred by a firearm as well as a family member impacted by the impairment or death of someone else (Buchanan, 2011). In this study, the term “victim” will mostly, yet not exclusively, be used to describe murder victims.

As of April 15, 2022, the day observed as Good Friday according to the Western Christian Calendar, the city of Philadelphia had already reported 132 homicides for the year (Rhynhart, 2022). It was a 9% increase from 2021, making April 15, dually the saddest day of the year for both Christians and all people in the city of Philadelphia. The city ended 2021 with reports of at least 2,313 victims of gun violence. African Americans accounted for eighty-four percent of that statistic. Of the total victims on record, 562 died from their injuries. Shooting deaths in 2021 were up thirteen percent and fifty-eight percent in comparison to 2020 and 2019, respectively. Gun-related homicides increased by 178% in a span of five years (between 2017 and 2021).

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) classifies gun violence as a social determinant of health—living, learning, and working conditions that affect a wide range of health and quality-of-life risks and outcomes. Therefore, people living in communities with limited social, economic, and educational opportunities are at a higher risk of gun violence. Experiences of stress related to racism, instabilities in the home, violence, social disadvantages, and material insecurities also contribute to the risk of gun violence. In response, these social

determinants, also known as silent killers and underlying causes of gun violence, must be addressed to reduce the risk of violent community crimes.

Covid-19 as a co-defendant

The Coronavirus disease, widely believed to have originated in China in 2019, caused U.S. national “stay at home” orders and corporate shutdowns in March 2020 after regional outbreaks of the disease spread into a pandemic. The orders and shutdowns created devastating and disparaging social issues in minority communities (Monte & Perez-Lopez, 2022). Most families dealing with job loss and financial insecurity prior to the pandemic continued to experience these issues throughout the pandemic. Higher unemployment rates and the long-term impact of mounting debt exacerbated individual and community needs, furthering uncertainty, anxiety, and stress in urban communities. Concerns were even more acute in Black (minority, and marginalized) communities (Holness, 2022). Hence, the pandemic has since been identified as the root cause and a significant contributing factor in the rise of gun violence in urban cities.

Philadelphia saw a 40% increase in gun violence in the first year (2020) of the pandemic. The city only had a 1% increase in gun violence from 2018 to 2019 (Rhynhart, 2022). However, the pandemic may be the superficial cause. Black Americans were at greater risk for post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological ramifications of the pandemic because their community bore, at incomparably greater rates, more illnesses, death, grief, economic decline, and social disruptions than the white population (Holness, 2022). Arguably, black people were already suffering conditions that predisposed them to such a devastating impact. Historical, racial, and systemic injustices continue to deteriorate poor, urban, and marginalized Black people as well as exacerbate chronic issues within their communities (Gusterson, 2011; Imani, 2020).

Therefore, when it comes to surges of gun violence, who else shares in the blame? Moreso, what might really be the cause of urban gun violence? To resolve an issue, the problem must be identified. The next section will discuss topics such as the impact of capitalism, poor community conditions, and racist models and systems.

Gun Violence: A Complex Tragedy

In “The Death of Gun Control”, Charles W. Collier (2014) defines tragedy as something terrible that was and is supposed to happen. He explains that the government has not broken the systems that presently perpetuate cycles of violence, poverty, and misfortune. Instead, the government is allowing these systems to continue to function this way because “they are working” and working as they should. In the case of gun violence, access to guns intends to have “awful, terrible, and eminently predictable consequences” (Collier, 2014). Therefore, he blames the government, describing them as just as intentional in harming a victim as the actual shooter who is pointing the gun because they allow the continuance of systems that create access to guns. The manufacturing of guns is the “remorseless workings” to the “inevitable destiny” of people of color. Although Collier (2014) casts blame, there is no recourse. Not even gun manufacturers can be sued for their role in gun violence due to the 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act pushed by NRA lobbyists, which gives them broad immunity (Collier, 2014).

On the other hand, immunity from guns does not seem to be the reason that gun manufacturers (or any culprit) avoids blame for a crisis that greatly affects black communities. Nor does it hinder efforts to work through system changes that would resolve the issue for the entities and organizations such as the media portrays black males as animal-like and criminally inclined which makes it hard for them to be seen as victims (Parham-Payne, 2014). When Black

bodies are vilified and seen as the culprit and “the condition”, it makes it difficult to render true culprits, systems, and conditions responsible. Imani (2020) explains that it is the legacy of chattel slavery, combined with the anti-Blackness that has come to define American racism, that means even free Black people are viewed as subhuman objects and objects to be controlled. Slave owners told themselves that Black men and women were especially suited for slavery during the slavery era. It was a perception based on the ancestors of enslaved Africans having worked relentlessly under the hot African sun (Boehm, 2010). Such perceptions diminish an ethnocentric lens and an ability to respect or receive insight on minority dispositions. Fifteen percent of the gun violence victims were children and teens per a review of 2008-2009. Forty-five percent of those child-victims were African Americans. Gun violence is the leading cause of deaths in African Americans between the ages of 15 and 19 (Buchanan, 2011; McClintock, 2019; The Children's Defense Fund, 2022). However, because of the stereotypes, racism, and other disparities, any possible policy or structural changes that could bring a resolve to gun violence and would protect the people- African Americans- impacted most are often overlooked and omitted from national and political discourse (Parham-Payne, 2014).

Collier (2014) believes a solution towards gun control is impossible due to timing even with gun control and reform being highly politicized issues. “It is too late to add legislation that will produce a happy ending,” he says. He further critiques tough gun bills as not being realistic, substantive, nor counter-reactive or reversible to the current conditions of the city. This is partly due to the historical systems currently at work in the United States. Besides, how can policy address intergenerational disadvantages (Hureau, 2022)? While Decker et al. (2018), Carbonari (2018), and Webster (2022) would disagree, Buchanan (2011) would agree that a comprehensive

policy, mostly noting the rehabilitation of survivors of shooting incidents, is not possible at this time.

The Impact and Influence of Capitalism

Is it possible that gun violence in Philadelphia is far deeper than a need for community aid and whatever else local leaders have deemed necessary? Local leaders and residents believe that the present-problems of gun violence are lack of access to community resources and leadership infighting. There were slight mentions of racism and capitalism. Dr. Rod White, who is a white male community leader, brought to the forefront a bold perspective of capitalism and the crippling effect of a White capitalist society. He offered the reminder that local leaders are seeking support for a people group that has been impoverished since the post-Civil War. “[That people group is] the configuration of Philadelphia,” White explains, “it’s a place where nobody gets anything.” Philadelphians may be blaming one another, the victim and shooter may look the same, and local government leaders (including police) may be African American, but an underlying struggle is a “dominant White capitalist group [that truly] runs the city and sucks the life out of whoever is in range” (R. White, personal communication, May 16, 2022).

White further recalls when John Street served the city of Philadelphia as its mayor, stating, “that the brothers [were] in charge.” He recounts the neighborhood initiative Street tried to get started, explaining “Street was famous for that, and I think he did some good.” However, White recalls that capitalism in the city make it hard to get such an initiative going in the right direction (R. White, personal communication, May 16, 2022). National writers and opinion columnists, such as Belén Fernández (2022), Ian Goodrum (2022), and Terry Evans (2022) has targeted capitalism as the culprit of gun violence in the United States following a series of mass

shootings in the summer of 2022, specifically at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, and Fourth of July events in Highland Park, Illinois and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

By capitalism, in part, White might be referencing national and local issues with the firearm industry and the top leaders of private companies who have earned multimillion dollar salaries from the sales of assault rifles which are predominantly used in mass shootings—also addressed by Hugh Gusterson (2013), a cultural anthropologist, and Dexter R. Voisin (2019), a psychotherapist focused on young people and structural violence. Top government leaders and even the manufacturing brands should be accountable to the state and the communities they served by providing oversight of gun use and not just gun sales (Collier, 2014). Attempts to assure such accountability played out publicly in court in July 2022 when top private gun company executives, Marty Daniel of Daniel Defense and Christopher Killoy of Sturm, Ruger, and Company attended a hearing held by the United States House Committee on Oversight and Reform (Figueroa, 2022; Goldiner, D. & McAuliff, M., 2022).

“In short, the gun industry is profiting off the blood of innocent Americans,” says Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney, a New York Democrat who also served as the chair of the committee investigating the role of gun manufacturer’s role in gun violence (Figueroa, 2022). There have been calls and public outcries for privately owned firearm companies to take responsibility for the deaths tied to their products. Wealthy whites generate the profits while minorities or individuals living in poverty account for a higher percentage of the deaths (Kennard, 2022; Knapp, 2020; Person & Trotta, 2022; Webster, 2022). Fifteen million guns are sold each year and even more used-guns exchange hands (Cook & Pollack, 2017). Still, victims typically come

from disadvantaged neighborhoods where there is an unequal distribution of guns (Webster, 2022). Further, the intranational arms trade even allows Western countries, such as the United States, to sell guns that kill people living in third-world countries in the Middle East and Africa (Gusterson, 2013).

There had been 571 mass shootings in the United States as of November 1, 2022 and by Black Friday (November 25), there were at least forty more. The recorded and verified mass shootings for 2021 totaled 691 (Gun Violence Archive, 2022). Notably, Philadelphia's June 4 South Street Shooting is among the mass shootings in 2022 which claimed the life of three individuals and seriously injured twelve others. Four additional mass shootings occurred in other states that very weekend according to news report. Mass shootings are tragic and equally devastating statistically. However, they do not occur as frequent or as much in number as urban gun violence. Gusterson (2013) explains that only the "few deranged whites" make up the lion's share of gun violence coverage via the news. Still, people image a cowboy when they think of guns—not the deranged mass shooter, and definitely not, the "Black boy in an alley" (Gusterson, 2013).

The image of a cowboy creates no problem for America with regards to guns. Wanda Parham-Payne (2013) would argue that guns and gun violence still would not be an American problem if Americans began to take a look at the issue from an ethnocentric lens. Unfortunately, it would be reduced to a local problem and a Black community issue. As it relates to crime and criminology, Black Americans are not framed by the media in a way that would elicit the same response of the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting due to the media's intentional depiction of African Americans and other people of color the criminal (Imani, 2020;

Metzl, 2016; Parham-Payne, 2013). Even city leaders question if gun manufacturers are to blame when it comes to Black community crimes. Are violent local citizens the real source of the blame (Figueroa, 2022)? Parallel rises in killings by both hand and knives draws further questions of whether community violence is more of a local issue than a gun issue.

Structural Racism and Neglect

Systemic issues of Germantown's past have caused disproportionately higher unemployment, poverty, and crime rates in comparison to neighboring sections of the city, despite priding itself on historical firsts and history-making moments. Dr. Eugenia C. South (2021b) attributes the cycle of gun violence to community neglect her article, "To Combat Gun Violence, Clean Up the Neighborhood." Her studies as the Director of the University of Pennsylvania's Urban Health Lab focus on creating evidence for efforts that combat the escalating social and safety needs of cities. Although the article reflects on conditions of the entire city of Philadelphia, this description captures community life in the Germantown Section of Philadelphia: dilapidated homes with blown-out windows, blocks with no trees, barren, concrete schoolyards, and vacant lots strewn with trash such as used condoms, needles, mattresses, and tires often dominate the landscape (South, 2021b). She explains that areas with gun violence create other social disparities that further impact the safety and security in urban cities.

Dr. South (2021b) states that before a Black man turns 45 years of age, his most probable cause of death is homicide. In another article, she identifies structural racism as the root cause of this deadly statistic. Structural racism is an invisible system—a silent killer. Yet, South (2021a) calls out a system hidden within the infrastructure of urban cities: "In Black neighborhoods of

large cities across the nation,” she states, “there are a small number of streets that are continuing to suffer from decades of disinvestment as well as physical and economic decline. Those streets now account for an outsize number of violent crimes.” Philadelphians have a history of community divestment. While city officials lend lease expiry and crime to factors for significant store closers in the city, the exit of long-standing businesses and companies is often critiqued as white flight.

The migration of African American families that began in the early 1900s, significantly impacted the demographics of the city of Philadelphia. The White American's response to the African American migration was white flight which caused property values to decline. In Berezowska and LeMay's *Germantown: A Town of Its Own* (2011), Eugene Stackhouse, former Germantown Historical Society president, attributes the significant demographic shift of Germantown to blockbusting and panic selling. Blockbusters preys off people's racist insecurities. There were realtors or entities that forewarn property owners that another race or class of people were moving into their neighborhood and then persuaded the owners to sell their properties quickly and cheaply. “What happens is you do not want to be the last white person to sell your house because you're going to get less money. You want to be the first because you know that your house is worth more,” says Draper. He concludes, “What I am saying is just absolutely evil” (M. Draper, personal communication, May 22, 2022).

“It was a great disgrace,” said Stackhouse, “Cheap houses would be sold to a Black family [in Germantown], then the realtors would go around and tell the neighbors that ‘the blacks are invading’” (Berezowska & LeMay, 2011). Nevertheless, what Draper and Stackhouse is describing—panic selling—was the onset of the panic seller. Panic sellers are the property

owners. When blockbusters created this sudden fear that the demand or market value of their property would drop, the owners made swift decisions to sell their properties. In turn, the blockbuster profited off the sold property by reselling it at a higher price. Subsequently, the exit of white families and department stores in shopping districts ensued as white families would relocate their families, businesses, and programs to other areas. This exit is known as white flight.

White flight, commonly classified as a phenomenon, is the process of white people moving out of urban areas, particularly with significant minority populations, and into suburban areas. However, white flight is not just about white people leaving the community. “It is when they take their capital,” says Dr. Draper, “They take their money. They take their businesses--their jobs. With the white migration to other parts of the suburbs, they take all this with them. And then all of a sudden, they're kind of like leaving this neighborhood [with nothing]” (M. Draper, personal communication, May 22, 2022). Gun violence is the result of the concerted closures exits of people and closures of businesses, and programs that would have brought value to urban communities. This violence occurs over time as a consequence to white flight, especially when city officials provide low intervention efforts (South, 2021a; Webster, 2022).

Economic Discrimination

Gun violence is in concentrated areas of blight and other signs of social and physical disorder (Webster, 2022). White further describes capitalism in the Philadelphia as a black hole because “most of the impoverished people in the United States live in the city”. He confirms that Philadelphia has the highest percentage of people living in poverty of any urban center. “There’s no money in the city, no money to exploit.” says White. Therefore, capitalists “just ignore them

as best they can” (R. White, personal communication, May 16, 2022). In turn, he explains, that leaves people underserved and at the mercy of whatever dominant person is there—people with guns, gangs with guns, police with guns. It also sends signals that the community and its members tolerate illegal behavior and crime there (Parham-Payne, 2014; Webster, 2022). White describes this as a cycle that creates sitting ducks—people with no protection or defense against danger and attacks. His understanding of the impact of capitalism supports the pastoral accounts (shared by co-researchers in Chapter 4) of the devastating cycle of gun violence that has plagued the city for decades.

White pushes to the forefront the identity of change versus capitalism, sharing that capitalism impacted John Street’s ability to make change. White suggests that capitalism perpetuates conditions in Philadelphia, allowing them to repeatedly happen in the same way (R. White, personal communication, May 16, 2022). Collier (2014) and White seem to agree that these tragic conditions can be curbed with significant intervention, substantial solutions, and sufficient capital aid. However, gun violence will continue to surge in the city if capitalism is not targeted as a root cause of the crisis. Further, can capitalism and racism truly be addressed and repented without reparations? Reparations can account for a dearth of financial resources, formal education programs, or job opportunities to facilitate growth and progress, and improved conditions for Black Americans (Imani, 2020). Communities have been devastated by gun violence and robbed of its human resources in so many ways, which pulls into question how and who repays the cost of loss and exploited lives.

The United States has proven that it is opposed to properly protecting and supporting Black Americans (Imani, 2020). Divestment and deindustrialization have had a significantly

unfavorable impact on those at the lowest end of the economic spectrum. African Americans received the brunt of the impact and burden of deindustrialization in places like Germantown (Voison, 2019). African Americans came up north for factory jobs during Jim Crow, an era purposed through laws to keep people of color living as second class citizens and separate from whites (Imani, 2020). The laws intentionally created disparities for people by city, race, and income. Gun violence can be considered a long-term impact of segregation because of the complex conditions it caused (Voison, 2019). Such violence further drains resources that are already thinly stretched (Buchanan, 2011). However, an immediate effect on Black communities—an upset for Black Americans after their migration to the north in search of industry work—was the lack of industry jobs. Draper explains that by the nineteen-seventies, “That’s all gone!” Industry work is replaced with service work, creating a societal shift where the new way people make money is by first going to college. “You don't have to go to college to work in a factory,” Draper says. There was a meat plant in Chicago. There was a Budd Company plant in Philadelphia, and there were lots of industries in the Midwest, in the area known as the Rust Belt. “Now, it's not there,” says Draper, “So, how do you rebuild African American communities after this” (M. Draper, personal communication, May 22, 2022)?

Black businessmen were lynched for sexually harassing white women when “a more credible impetus for their murders was their economic competition with local white grocery store owners” (Imani, 2020, p. 7). This wealth inequity tactic was rarely talked about until Ida B. Wells exposed it through publication. Wealth inequity—disparities in how individuals are able to gain and sustain income—impacts the gap in homicides among Whites and Blacks (Light & Ulmer, 2016). A study of the crack epidemic found that the 1984 – 1989 rise led to an 150%

increase in homicides with young Black men without effecting young white men. Homicides during 1985-1992 more than doubled for young Black men while the rate of homicides remained stable for young Black men. These gun-related homicides are attributed to the crack epidemic because individuals participating in the illegal gun trade are likely to carry a firearm to protect the large number of drugs and money they are carrying (Light & Ulmer, 2016; unnamed pastor, personal communication, April 2022). Further, drug activity fuels mass incarceration and creates difficulty to find work after incarceration, prompting social disorganization.

Social disorganization decreases community bonds, diminishes job markets, and reduces social capital. Inevitably, the increases in mass incarceration, illegal activity, and homicides impact one another. Thus, this spiral in community decline and victimization patterns continue to mirror perpetration patterns (Lynch et al, 2016). The research has found that there are gaps and correlations that perpetuate community crime—between owning a gun and becoming a victim (Kleck & Hogan, 1999), crime and place (Weisburd et al, 2016), common risk factors and common prevention factors (Decker et al, 2018), legal and illegal availability of guns (Stolzenberg & D’ Alessio, 2000; Voison, 2019), masculine identity and employment, especially after incarceration (Stolzenberg & D’ Alessio, 2000), and building remediation and reduction of assaults with guns (Webster, 2022). There is also a correlation between wealth and social disorganization (Light & Ulmer, 2016).

Gentrification (a political strategy to push minorities out of the area with high taxes and other pressures) and redlining (an economical strategy to deny minorities mortgages for properties in certain areas within a city) are some quick and faux fixes to social disorganization and community crime. However, these discriminatory fixes only satisfy the physical

infrastructure of the community. Draper explains, “The other way [to help the people in the community] is hard work—you rebuild the community. You bring job incentives, you build up the school systems, you build up the education and things like this. But that could take 30 years. That is a long-term approach. Gentrification is much quicker and easier.” Ignoring vacant and dilapidated buildings in communities only perpetuates crime. For instance, it provides “stash houses” for people engaged in illegal activity. Whereas remediated buildings reduce the access to resources that allow people to engage in such activities (Hureau, 2022; Parham-Payne, 2014; Webster, 2022). Legal and more equitable solutions for meeting vital needs can promote safe, stable, and nurturing environments for both children and adults (Decker et al, 2018). Lynch et al. (2016) suggests four things to help decrease victimization and perpetrated patterns in communities. Two priorities include implementing universal background checks and restricting the manufacturing and selling of firearms and ammunition. The third effort is to remove gag orders that prevent doctors from talking about gun violence as a health or injury science concern.

The last effort is to garner a commitment to research (Lynch, 2016). It is challenging to gain endorsement and move toward implementation of these proposals and other efforts given the counter efforts of NRA lobbyists who have been influential enough to not only restrain and restrict research but convince budgets changes, specifically a \$2.6 million cut in gun injury research (Gusterson, 2014; Voison, 2019). Millions of dollars in medical costs spent on gun violence anyway. Hence, communities continue to seek models that work with regards to reducing gun violence (Mair et al, 2006). Decker et al. (2018) emphasizes the need to evaluate effectiveness while offering a variety of public health responses to gun violence. Like Collier

(2014), yet much more hopeful, Decker et al. (2018) believes that every resolution and idea needs to have a good outcome. This is achieved through evaluation.

Resolutions also must be data-driven and focused (Webster, 2022). The government needs to back it with effective firearm regulations (Cook & Pollack, 2017). The government should implement efforts that can reduce societal burdens caused by guns, tobacco, and motor vehicles (Heneway, 2006). Decker et al. (2018), Carbonari (2018), and Webster (2022) are much more hopeful that substantive resolves are possible and stress that other sectors need to be engaged in producing positive and effective outcomes. A comprehensive plan gives voice to those who are not able to speak (Buchanan, 2011; Parham-Payne, 2014). It should be mindful not to exclude the voices of persons who have inflicted violence, as well (Hylton, 2022). Service, or as Herman (2015) calls it “social action,” can mean intervening and providing insight for violence interruption. Therefore, service is not only a pathway for healing but an effective way for offenders to right wrongs (Hylton, 2022; unnamed pastor, personal communication, April 2022).

Troubled Youth

On average, seven children and teens a day are killed by guns: that’s one Sandy Hook School Shooting every three days (Gusterson, 2013). In *When Trauma Kills*, McClintock (2019) shares what it feels like to lose a child. “When you suffer a loss like this, it feels like this: Not only has my loved one died, I have died as well. My former life, the life I would have lived with that now-dead loved one, exists no more... Because we do not know we’re grieving for ourselves as well as our loved ones, we can’t get to the source of our grief, and it comes to seem bottomless, as if the world were made of grief. But somehow, we survive. It is amazing how

many of us survive” (p. 121). Losing a child can be life shattering. Parents in Philadelphia mourn children in high numbers. Yet, they, like many Black Americans, may feel the pressure to keep their problems a secret to avoid any more negative associations with their community, given portrayals of the media (Holness, 2022; Parham-Payne, 2014).

In *Underground Gun Markets*, Cook et al. (2007) talks about the cultural dilemma parents of color face when trying to balance their role in their child’s life with what it means for their child to be a man. Sometimes, it is at the expense of dishonoring his family and community. Horowitz (2017), Gardener (2021) and Cook et al. (2007) stress that gang members in communities are not strangers. They are children and neighbors of community members or even rival gang members of youth who until recently went to the nearby church. Relationships with offenders create situations where, although community members do not condone gang violence, they understand it having watched the young people grow up, enduring poor upbringings, unfortunate living conditions, and urban plight. (Horowitz, 2017). Tragically, more people are killed by guns in their home by a loved one or a neighbor than by a stranger who enters their home.

These communities do not tolerate violence. However, when the offender or perpetrator is someone that you know and love, it often gives community members little choices and power to respond (McClintock, 2019). It also lessens the ability to intervene during peak risks (Decker et al, 2018); especially, when according to Webster’s (2022) 2016 study on gun violence, young shooters were aiming for the head of their victims and shooting to kill. His study showed that young shooters were more lethal than their predecessors. So, how do you begin to address that? Gun manufacturers Daniel and Killoy were questioned regarding the lives of young people lost

and the advertisements that encouraged gun violence. These advertisements were marketed to young men who among other devastating statistics account for 80% of fatal accidental shootings. Yet, the gun manufacturers deflected blame (Buchanan, 2011; Figueroa, 2022; Goldiner, D. & McAuliff, M., 2022). Questioning also included their perceived responsibility for the actions of gun users. The top CEO leaders were convinced that gun violence and mass shootings were local problems, caused by local murders, and therefore need to be handled locally or by local leaders. They stood firmly on the premise that they manufacture inanimate objects.

Gusterson (2013) would disagree, presenting gun violence as an American problem since 80% of gun violence happens in this country which is more than “in 23 of the richest countries combined”. He presents the data from an ethnographic lens, casting light on disproportionate racial differences between the individuals who fall victim and the individuals who profit from gun sales. Blame aside, McClintock (2019) suggests that everyone should take part in ending the gun crisis. He says, “recovery takes a community and prevention takes a nation.” This concept does not only demand the participation of government leaders and gun manufacturers to work towards solution-based actions. It also makes a way for the community to come together to pursue healing after tragedy. Parents of both shooters and victims, who hide due to shame or the fear of scrutiny, can also share in experiences of re-membering along with the community and participate in therapeutic activities that restore them and others (Swinton, 2007; Holness, 2022). It should be noted that although several hearings were held and all companies were asked to attend, Smith and Wesson Brands was noticeably absent. President and CEO Mark P. Smith failed to appear before the committee (Figueroa, 2022).

Communities are still making a way to overcome gun violence regardless of gun manufacturers support and the shift in blame to local areas, where young people perpetuate and fall victim to gun-related crimes. In “Being the Change,” Marnie Curry (2013) confirms that it is widely perceived that urban youth are to blame. Urban youth have been characterized as baby killers and associated with criminality and deviance. A shared negative conception is that gun violence, which takes the lives of their friends and fellow urban youth, is merely the reaped rewards of their insanity. This is an unfair and irresponsible observation, given there are already numerous insecurities, lack of stability, and limited opportunities available to children growing up in communities devastated by gun violence. Nevertheless, these children were able to shed the identity of “baby killers” by implementing initiatives that decreased violence and made their places where they live, work, and learn safer for themselves and younger children.

If children are to take responsibility for gun violence, who is to take responsibility for the children? In June 2022, a group of Black teens—the youngest among them being ten years of age—violently beat to death a 73-year-old Black man. One of his attackers, a fourteen-year-old girl, repeatedly used a traffic cone (Chinchilla et al., 2022). Most of the children will be tried as adults. Yet, they are still children who were left unsupervised, outside of their homes in the middle of the night, which speaks to their upbringing and living conditions.

Infighting and Poor Leadership

Another issue is the infighting and blame-shifting among city leadership, which has often been put on public display through news channels or front news pages. Both the mayor and police chief of Chicago, Illinois, shifted blame towards the other with regards to responses to mitigating and ending gun violence through televised press conferences. The mayor also spoke

out against Cook County State's Attorney Kimberly Foxx for not being tough enough on crime and was subsequently accused of blame shifting. Similarly, in July 2021, Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown blamed the courts for the city's high gun violence rates, encouraging the people to consider, "What can the courts do [in response to the weekend where 12 of the 70 shooting victims were killed]?" Later that day, news anchor Rob Elgas reported that Superintendent Brown refused to acknowledge for the press that the department's anti-gun violence strategy was ineffective and needed to change (Wall, 2021). Brown stood firm on the claim that as the police arrest violent criminals, the courts release them.

Public platforms create opportunities for governmental leaders to confront gun manufacturing leaders and to examine their role in gun violence. However, governmental infighting serves as a distraction. Tennessee Lookout reporter Figueroa (2022) shared that Republicans on the [United States House Committee on Oversight and Reform] pushed back against Democrats and argued that the Second Amendment allowed for Americans to have these firearms and that gun manufacturers are not to blame for gun violence. Further, Kentucky Republican James Comer, assisted gun manufacturers in shifting the blame and responsibility of gun violence by stating that "criminals cause violent crime." However, the number of deaths by firearms can be devastating when considering the impact of gun violence in concentrated areas.

Leaders at every level of community change continue to be divided on a strategy to contend the gun violence crisis. Further, people contending with the on-going crisis of crime are excluded from sharing their voices or giving voice to actual experiences (Parham-Payne, 2014). Nevertheless, African Americans have the grit to make a way out of no way by creating their own infrastructures of support when none is given (Imani, 2020). Support seems scarce.

However, Gardener (2021) says that the Black Church and Black community has the ingredients—warmth, sense of belonging, identity, community, ownership, and a “we are in this together” shared labor attitude—to get through disasters such as gun violence.

Leading gun manufacturers and governmental leaders are not the only groups that have found it difficult to get along for the sake of ending violent crime in urban communities. Dr. Rodney K. Brunson, a Fellow of the American Society of Criminology at the University of Maryland, discussed recent publications of research regarding his studies of church involvement in shootings. He said that it was quite a surprising discovery to learn that many pastors did not have good relationships with one another. Brunson’s studies of efforts to reduce violent crime in Black Communities often revealed clergy infighting. Similarly, a Germantown pastor acknowledges, “There is violence in the church. The clergy do not like each other.” This pastor believes that the church’s influence and involvement would be much more effective if “[church leaders] weren’t doing the same [things as the shooters and violent criminals in the streets]” (Anonymous pastor, personal conversation, April 30, 2022). There is no evidence or reports of pastoral leaders committing violent crimes in Germantown. However, this pastor and another co-researcher compared the impact of clergy conduct to be just as, if not more, devastating than the behavior of murderers and violent criminals.

A Study of Germantown, Pennsylvania

There was a drive-by shooting that claimed the life of one man and injured two other people on Sunday, September 12, 202. This was in the afternoon, shortly after church and mosque services had ended. Two other fatal shootings would be reported for the day (Dunn,

2021). Yet, this would be one of the two times in a two-week span that members of churches sitting on a short block in Germantown would exit their Sunday services to witness a drive-by shooting. It would be the third time within about 45 days that this small area of the city would experience a drive-by shooting, two of which were fatal. Imagine the two months of trauma these pastors, congregants, and community members must have faced amid a pedestrian hit and run, burglaries, other violent incidents, and sporadic sightings of walkways and businesses blocked off with yellow crime scene tape and parked police vehicles.

One of the last shootings of that year occurred in the Germantown section of Philadelphia (6abc Digital Staff, 2022; Rhynhart, 2022). It was close to midnight on Thursday, December 30, when a gang of shooters fired more than eighty shots, injuring six people. (6abc Digital Staff, 2022) In 2021, less than 10% of all shooting victims' locations could not be identified. Therefore, the controller's report can only confirm that there were seventeen gun-violence victims within that short street, two victims sustained fatal injuries. There was only a total of two non-fatal shooting victims, both in that area of that short Germantown street, in the year prior. The 2021 reports prove that gun violence has spread up and down the block, impacting a one-and-a-half-mile radius with gun violence (Rhynhart, 2022). Per the *Gun Violence Crisis Map*, in 2021 several other streets (within the five blocks being studied) were identified as yellow (elevated level) and orange (moderate)-level gun violence hotspots in the city, which was an escalation in comparison to its previous year.

An Origin Story of the Germantown Section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Germantown is fondly known as the birthplace of the anti-slavery movement. It is also the birthplace of Rev. Richard Allen, the father of African American Methodism. Briefly, a

Germantown White House became the home of President George Washington during the yellow fever epidemic. It hosted the battle site during the American Revolutionary War that motivated the country of France to join on America's side. Germantown takes up an area of about 1.5 miles and runs between Washington Lane on the north to what is now Wayne Junction on the south. The old Indian trail known as The Great Road that ran through the developing borough in the 1600s is now known as Germantown Avenue. (The Germantown Courier Advertiser, 1967). Today, Germantown Avenue runs through the Chestnut Hill, Mount Airy, Germantown, Nicetown, and Tioga sections of Philadelphia.

Germantown was a borough settled by Dutch Quakers from Germany prior to becoming a section of Philadelphia, in 1854. In the summer of 1683, Francis Daniel Pastorius purchased 15,000 acres of land from William Penn. Thirteen German families from the town of Crefeld would immigrate to Pennsylvania a few months later, making the area the first permanent German settlement in America (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2018). The town would begin in a cave along the banks of the Delaware River. The first families would live in houses that were dugout of the ground. Therefore, they brace the cold winters during their first and second years, while clearing the land for more efficient habitation. Within five years, the town would become Pennsylvania's first borough, after William Penn received it as a charter in 1689, and royally approved in 1691. The borough of Germantown functioned as a closed corporation, only allowing suffrage to its members, and handling their own affairs. Subsequently, in 1707, the borough lost its charter, because in good conscience community members did not participate in court and government affairs (Ulle, 2017). It was then annexed to Philadelphia shortly after being re-instated as a borough (The Germantown Courier Advertiser, 1967).

Today, less than 20% of Germantown residents identify as White and about sixty-three percent of the section is African American (Citydata.com, n.d.). Yet, Gospelletics, a pastor serving Germantown Ave, says that specifically in the area he serves, the African American population is about 85% or higher and has been for some time (Gospelletics, personal communication, April 21, 2022). In comparison to the rest of Philadelphia, Germantown populations' density exceeds the city's average by 50%. According to City Data (n.d.), household-sizes average seven people; Philadelphia averages less than 3. There is a 20% marriage rate and 34% single parenthood rate. Employment rates by professions are slightly lower than overall city percentages. Still, women have higher rates of employment than men in the area. The section has a high homeownership rate, although most properties are purposed as rental units. Further, the length of rental stays appears to be longer in comparison to the overall city (Citydata, n.d.). This could possibly mean that adults never experience homeownership or leave public housing, which is a cycle that continues for long-established Black families in Philadelphia. Another unintentional consequence is that children born into poverty remain in poverty as adults and will eventually contribute to the numbers.

Reflections from Community Members

“We make sure we close up shop by 5 PM, even earlier sometimes in the winter” says a retail clerk that works along Germantown Avenue. A fight outside of the front doors of the storefront prompted this conversation at the counter. Together, the patrons and store associates watched through the big glass windows as bystanders attempted to break up a scuffle between two people. The clerk continues to explain that leaving the block before it gets dark only provides peace of mind for the staff (Anonymous clerk, personal conversation, December 2021).

Criminal activity is also common in the daytime. Shop owners are on alert for robberies or an issue in the street to carry over into their store even with security officers and armed guards. Desperate acts, retaliations, violent assaults can happen at any time, for any reason, to anyone. The clerk shared that she sleeps comfortably a night, living two blocks away in another section of Philadelphia. “Trouble doesn’t come up this way,” says the unnamed clerk, “as soon as I turn the corner out of Germantown [while walking home], I know that I will be okay” (Anonymous clerk, personal conversation, December 2021).

“There’s violence in cities because people are hurting. It is spreading so quickly because as soon as someone hurts you and you know what hurt feels like, you can hurt someone else,” says the case manager of a nearby community action agency, “And then that person goes and hurts someone, too. So, we have to be there to help them” says the case manager of a nearby community action agency, “[We have to] help them by meeting their needs and trying to help them work out their issues” (Anonymous casework, personal conversation, January 2022). The case worker further explained that the joint effort of both Christian service and social service is the only way to help people get over their hurt. A desired outcome of helping a victim find healing is that it can prevent that person from hurting someone else or causing more community issues. A senior housing case manager would agree, putting the onus on neighborhood social service agencies. The case manager urges, “These are our people—Black People! Who is going to help them, if we [as Black social service providers] don’t do it” (Anonymous housing case manager, personal conversation, January 2022)?

Similarly to Dr. South (2021a), the housing case manager believes that racism, and the lack of regard for people of color, has contributed greatly to the lack of access, service, and uplift

in decaying urban communities. They stressed the importance of advocating, investing, and providing the appropriate and effective services so as not to oppress the people we (agencies) are serving, as well (Anonymous housing case manager, personal conversation, January 2022). In an interview with Millicent Clark, the Director of a Christian-based neighborhood services agency, she shares two critical community needs—poverty intervention and socialization. She explains, “I am witnessing the need for providers to be compassionate and to have a listening ear. People are struggling economically and are in need of provisions for food, shelter, utilities, and clothing” (M. Clark, personal communication, May 7, 2022). Community members also need more opportunities to be around others. The COVID-19 pandemic limited socialization and created a new “common safety” issue, which includes a need for personal protection. Clark describes common safety issues as needs for better living conditions and emotional assistance for those struggling due to the increases of domestic and gun violence. She suggests that providers ensure access; this means the community members are aware of the resources available to address their personal struggles and needs (M. Clark, personal communication, May 7, 2022).

The Germantown Section of Philadelphia has a rich and vibrant history. There has been a vast and gradual shift in the section’s outlook, demographics, and economy although religious foundations and remnants of Quaker-life remain in the community. Business closures and limitations to professional and academic opportunities have contributed to the uptick in crime, leaving not only community members but also church members in the area feeling hopeless and let down by their municipal and pastoral leaders (South, 2021a; Webster, 2022). Solutions to alleviate and eradicate moral and urban decay in the area are often foiled by infighting amongst municipal, political, and clergy leaders (R. Brunson, personal communication, November 29,

2021). Nevertheless, gun violence has taken a toll on both community leaders and community members alike.

Gun Violence and the Urban African American Pastor

This section provides a brief overview of the Black Church and the role of pastors regarding their experiences with gun violence and dives deeply into three professional fields—the missiology, sociology, and criminology—that clergy can directly influence. There is a general understanding that the church is a body of Christian believers (people). It is also widely known as the building used by these believers to hold public worship. In *Participating in God's Mission*, Gelder et al. (2018) states that the United States has always experienced profound, especially cultural, changes that forces the American Church to adapt accordingly. Subsequently, there are always “new opportunities for new forms of Christian witness and organizational expressions of the church to emerge” (Gelder et al., 2018, p. 1). Further, the purpose of the church and its preaching, which is a primary function of pastoral ministry, is to hold on to and be moved by the living memories of the past, present, and future (Guthrie, 2005).

The term “Black Church” is an abstract of African American Christianity, broadly and fondly representing the faith, traditions, denominations, congregations, and body of Christian believers of African or African American ancestry in the United States. The term is used to separate the spiritual life and activities of churches (that minister to and are ministered by Black People) from other understandings or constructs for churches and people of faith.

The Black Church and Black Theology: Two Separate Things.

There are multiple denominations under the umbrella of the “Black Church.” They are all driven by different theologies, making the Black Church a structure that is not easily homogenized; nor is it monolithic. Yet, there is a common thread—every individual congregation, denomination, and theology can draw on the strength that brought them through adversity such as slavery and the Civil Rights Era (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994). God is identified as the source of their strength of most African Americans. They rely heavily on their religion and spirituality during seasons of difficulty. Faith has been a core coping mechanism through a variety of hardships. (Bell-Tolliver & Wilkerson, 2011; Whitley, 2012). Origins of the Black Church date back to the era of African American Slavery, when male slaves that had converted to Christianity were allowed to preach an other-worldly Gospel to fellow slaves. Other-World Theology is the adoption of the White Lie—a belief that Christians should not have a worldly desire to enjoy their lives (Cone & West, 2018). Instead, they should look forward to, with long suffering, another life with God in heaven.

A memorable slave preacher, Rev. Nat Turner of the Turner Plantation in Virginia, started his pastoral career civilizing slaves and encouraging them to obey their masters in light of other-worldness (Greenberg, 2004; Holden, 2021). Turner received what he believed to be a God-given vision of earthly freedom. Hence, his ministry ended in 1831 following the insurrection and murder of more than fifty slave owners, the consequential massacre of hundreds of Black slaves, his hanging, and strict laws regarding gatherings of Black people (Breen, 2019; Holden, 2021). This calls to question whether a faith tradition passed down to slaves from the White American Church is to the benefits of African Americans. Does the acceptance of

American Christianity for Black people consequently allow a society where gun-related crimes continue to surge?

Capitalism has been correlated with American History and American Christianity since the beginning. Not only has capitalism been deemed an underlying cause of national gun violence, but it has also been accused of motivating the slave trade and the proselytization of enslaved people. Capitalism manipulated the spread of a content-slave-faith-culture, perpetuated by fellow enslaved pastors, to subdue a desire for freedom. Black scholars critique the impact of White theology on the Black Church, claiming American Christian faith is eschatological with the persuasion that oppressed people should only have a desire for freedom in another life. However, Black Theology, also known as Black Liberation Theology, is not other-worldly. It is earthly, in comparison, and liberating; it faces the current realities and seeks justice for today. It perceives the Gospel in a way that allows believers to relate and identify with a crucified, betrayed, and bruised Jesus (Katongole, 2017).

Black Liberation Theology is a form of Liberation theology that began in Latin America and was later contextualized for African Americans. It was believed by many spiritual leaders within the Black Community that White theologians ignored the suffering of Blacks and supported a White nationalist and white supremacist theology that built up the nation (Cones, 2020). Therefore, in 1970, James Cone authored a book called, *Black Theology of Liberation*, presenting a faith for all people of the African diaspora that reflected their lived experiences. Diana Hayes, says that Black Liberation Theology asks, “whose side should God be on?” (Hayes, 1996). A true Christian faith should be cognizant of the needs of oppressed, marginalized people—not siding with the oppressors or capitalists.

Cone (2020) encourages the universal church to make Christian Theology and Black Theology synonymous concepts for the sake of Christ—understanding his character, his will, and his mission in the world. Unfortunately, Christian mission through the American Church has been driven offshore synchronously with “the dominance the Western colonial powers exercised over most of the world” (Gelder et al., 2018, p. 3). Even today, church groups can drive through predominantly African American cities and communities on their way to international airports to engage in missions in Africa. Gelder et al. (2018) says the assumption is that, in America, everyone is already a Christian. However, what Black theologians criticize white theology’s failure to grasp is that, in America, there are still problems that need faithful and meaningful responses.

The critique of American Christianity failing to respond to social issues has been met with literature that encourages the American Church to reimagine the way it does Christian mission. In *The New Parish*, Sparks et al. (2014) encourages a faithful presence around community concerns, such as education, civics, economics, and the environment, to build healthy relationships. Even solidarity around common ground can create differences and infighting. Therefore, the core concept regarding common concerns is a faithful presence. There are pastors who enter ministry as a second career. Transitioning from the corporate setting to a community setting requires some professional adaptations—increased mindfulness as to how one shows up to work alongside his or her neighbors. In Guthrie’s (2005) *From Pew to Pulpit*, a seminary student recalled his experience ministering to the Latino congregation. Two characteristics of the congregation were that the members preferred a community-oriented preaching style and were much more receptive to the spoken Word. Directing the congregation

to turn to a passage of scripture and avoiding the community's immediate and most pressing concerns would not be a relatable style for the congregation since storytelling was the way they received the gospel and achieved justice. Guthrie (2005) explains that preaching occurs 1) within a local community of faith, 2) with a community of fellow preachers, and 3) within the community of saints. This means that pastors share experiences with congregants in worship and alongside pastors through a shared lectionary at any location where believers gather.

One of the African American's first major civil rights protests occurred in Philadelphia in 1787 when Black churchgoers departed from the Methodist Church, following the lead of a Germantown-born pastor, the Reverend Richard Allen (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Upon their exit, the Free African Society was formed. This society helped people find employment and housing, educated the community, and responded to epidemics (Ncurrie, 2021). Likewise, Black congregations and pastors serving in Philadelphia are still relied on to address community needs in place of more suitable professional help, resources, or institutions. The mindset and motivation to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps—the self-help mentality—encouraged African Americans to avoid relying on White Americans for help. African Americans have created their own spaces rather than wait for understanding, fairness, and acceptance in churches and other community spaces, and have done so for centuries, especially in Philadelphia.

Church leaders, despite their level of education and expertise, are valued over specialists even during times of tragedy and trauma. Most members of Black congregations and communities prefer the help of their pastor per the African Americans' deep-rooted history of neglect, oppression, and mistreatment from White Americans. Today, community members continue to turn to their local congregations to guide and help them through turbulent times. In

“Second Victims: Aftermath of Gun Violence and Faith-Based Responses,” Panagis Galiatsatos (2021) certifies churches and their leaders to assist mental health and wellness providers reach and serve second victims. Clergy are named as people invited to share in the responsibility of helping victims recover and heal from their traumatic loss. Galiatsatos (2021) instructs clergy contribute to the efforts by offering a couple of approaches. Yet, what is notably missing is where and how ministers learn to contribute. There is no mention of professional development opportunities for clergy. Pastors may have some personal experience being victims and only a little professional practice coaching people through recovery. However, they are expected to build relationships, contribute to dire situations meaningfully, and assess the needs of the present victims so that they can make appropriate connections and referrals.

Post-slavery and during other eras (Civil Rights) in United States history, there were not many professional providers to help Black people cope with the hardship and violence that they experienced. African Americans supported themselves—their communities—financially, mentally, emotionally, and socially and learned to survive on their own (Littlefield, 2005). The Black Church did the same, gaining financial stability and autonomy from White overseers. The Black Church was one of the only places that were not dominated by a White American majority culture (Douglas & Hopson, 2001). It provided therapeutic relief, safety, and dignity. When African Americans are feeling oppressed, hurt, harmed, or in the need of upliftment, they can turn to the Black Church. Not much has changed with regards to the Black Church today; it continues to advocate for social justice and focus on systemic issues. The Black Church remains a vital part of the urban community and a place where African Americans could go to find help combating issues and concerns. Traditionally, it provides family and human services

programming such as material assistance, substance abuse services, tutoring, mentoring, and nonreligious education services (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Tsitsos, 2003).

Leaders of the Black Church, namely the urban African American pastor, are invaluable to the people living within the communities that they serve. The pastor works tirelessly to serve its community beyond the pulpit. Black pastors do not solely feel called to the pews, pastoral care, and parachurch ministries. Thus, they pursue their ministry calling through the media, at the polls, in classrooms, through human services and the court system, and by other means.

Community Care Relative to Gun Violence

Clergy have been instrumental in the fight to end gun violence within their communities, providing a variety of solution-based strategies. In April of 2013, Black clergy across the nation launched the African American Church Gun Control Coalition, calling gun violence “both a sin and a public health crisis” and committing to a three-year action plan of advocacy, education, and legislative responses (Banks, 2016). The coalition brought together predominantly Black denominations—the National Progressive Baptist Convention, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and National Baptist Convention, USA—to work on reform in their local areas as well as nationwide. This effort was not set to work against city leadership. It intended to hold city leadership accountable.

Similarly, in Philadelphia, clergy employ efforts to assist police in city leadership as well as hold them accountable. The Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity has been aggressive and adamant about gun violence prevention and the creation of safe spaces for young people in

the city. Saunders (2021) reported that the Black Clergy of Philadelphia, a coalition group of African American clergy in Philadelphia and its surrounding area, stood in front of the Waterview Center in the Germantown section of Philadelphia to advocate the center's renovation and repair. The center is not on the city's rebuild list; therefore, their demands were to ensure city action was taken to upgrade the rundown facility. In light of Banks (2013) and Saunders (2021), it appears that when clergy speak up, it is not with the intent to speak out against the city and its leadership. Rather, the clergy's voice is agitating and prophetic for the sake of acknowledging and advocating for relevant and vital community needs.

Additionally, Black Pastors in Philadelphia have also developed plans to address gun violence. In the article "Black Clergy Group Unveils Plan to Address Gun Violence," Ayana Jones (2021) shares the recommendations coming from the Black Clergy of Philadelphia's multifaceted plan to end gun violence. The purpose was to create a public-private partnership supported by the city, state, and federal levels to raise \$100 million for grassroots organizations that are offering community-based violence solutions. Secondly, Mayor Jim Kenney was asked to appoint a czar or deputy mayor dedicated to comprehensively addressing violence eradication and convene all municipal government and city officials responsible for public safety. This financial demand is in line with required reparations to address the systemic issues that that perpetuate community conditions that lead to gun violence.

The work of the church and city is becoming more closely knit in Philadelphia. The Black Clergy's plan generously invited city officials to share in the church's work to end gun violence and invest the time in their community, learning their needs and navigating the current realities and trends. In turn, the city has allowed the Black Church to share in its work by

employing clergy to serve in government leadership positions that are focused on fighting gun violence. The Reverend Gregory Holston, the then-Chair of the Black Clergy's Criminal Justice Reform and Violence Prevention Committee also serves as Senior Advisor on Advocacy and Policy for the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. Also, the Reverend Doctor Myra Maxwell, a Philadelphia area pastor, serves as the District Attorney's office as the Executive Director of both the Victim Support Services division and Crisis Assistance, Response and Engagement for Survivors (CARES) program.

Rev. Dr. Maxwell's team receives the first call from the police whenever a shooting incident happens; immediately they begin to work with the family on the scene, providing victim services (Coleman, 2021). A part of her work is anti-retaliation and prevention. She explains in the article "Seeking Gun Violence Remedies, Policing Reforms" that the CARES team is there to support the family for about 45 days, walking with them through an exceedingly complicated process, which sometimes includes discouraging friends and family members from seeking violent revenge (Coleman, 2021). While there is a push for city government involvement and policies to address urban gun violence, it is not a monolithic objective of the clergy.

Not every church plan prioritizes or desires a partnership with the city government. Hamil Harris (2013) insists that clergy cannot afford to wait for a political solution to end gun use and violence. Instead, in the same year of the 2013 Banks' plan, clergy developed a national three-year covenant plan in response to Congress' inability to pass a gun violence law. This plan increases the use of community-based coalitions and employs individual efforts of pastors such as tent crusades targeting young men. Similarly, not every community plan to end gun violence has a place or much space for the church to serve as a stakeholder. In "Being the Change,"

Marnie Curry (2013) shares a remarkable report of a successful campaign to end gang-related gun violence in his community. The report was contingent upon collective efficacy, yet clergy are not mentioned in the article; faith-based responses or influence was not a part of the solution. Also, in “Building Community Resilience to Prevent and Mitigate Community Impact of Gun” Violence, Emily Wang (2020) presents a conceptual framework that minimally involves the church—they only reflect two of the eight “effort levers” to mitigate gun violence. In her framework, the church is mostly resourced as an asset to the Wellness Lever, promoting social and economic wellbeing. Other wellness assets include relationships with neighbors or family, barbershops, and parks.

Black Pastors are one of the biggest drivers of community self-sufficiency, per Wang’s framework. A church-organized gun buy-back serves as an example of the Self-Sufficiency lever at work (Wang, 2020). It demonstrates a community member’s or members’ ability to take actions that create safe and orderly community environments. In light of Wang’s (202) explanation of community resilience, levers are initial building blocks, representing an essential element of safe community living. The eight levers are in place to ensure community resilience by preparing the community to anticipate and respond to gun violence. It seemingly can have the greatest impact although the church is only required to play a small part. Self-sufficiency [speaks] to the role that community members had in building the core component of social cohesion, which is critical to community resilience (Wang, 2020). This allows the church to continue functioning in the role of bringing everyone together and keeping everyone working together.

Black community resilience can be done badly, especially when resilience is mistaken for immunity (Imani, 2020). In *Making a Way Out of No Way*, Boehm (2010) defines resilience as the capability of a human to continue in the face of great adversity. She explains that it was believed that an ability for Black people to withstand “hard work and hot temperatures” was in their bloodlines, and it was a perception that carried well beyond the enslavement of Black people to the employment of the Black maid. Hard, menial work not only “enriched” racists thinking and models of difference, but it also added a more negative flavoring to the myth of the “strong black woman” (Boehm, 2010). However, resilience as defined by Boehm, is a commitment to making a way out of no way. Gardener (2021) considers it a conviction that “my struggle and survival are bigger than me”. Hence, African Americans are driven by songs and scriptures that serve as a reminder to keep going while yet aware of the injustices they are facing. Pastors have also motivated social action in response to poverty, politics, and other difficulties and tragedies (Gardener, 2021).

Pastor Corey Brooks, the founder and CEO of Project H.O.O.D. Communities Development Corporation, spent more than three months living on top of his roof of a rundown motel until he raised support to buy and knock down the building. The community’s generous response demonstrated Wang’s (2020) lever of self-sufficiency. The land is now earmarked to be the location of a 23-million-dollar state-of-the-art community center, which will offset violence, provide the support necessary to make the neighborhood a safer place, and give children the tools to reach for a brighter future (Project H.O.O.D., 2022). In “A Battle for People’s Souls”, Charlene Aaron (2021) details Brooks and another pastor’s efforts to tackle gun violence as a “God-given, spiritual battle”. Pastor Dimas Salaberrios, a former drug dealer, created a

documentary, *Chicago: America's Hidden War*, with the hopes of changing the narrative on gun and gang activity in the city. The film focuses on how the church is combating gun violence with the gospel, evangelism, and prayer, whereas Brook's Project H.O.O.D provides outreach and conflict mediation by going "out into the neighborhood to help make sure there is no retaliation for violence" (Aaron, 2021).

Both Pastors Salaberrios and Brooks agree that there is a discernible demonic presence and spirit of murder in their city. Brooks believes that this evil works its way into the lives of young people mostly through gang activity. "The enemy is out to kill, steal and destroy people in our community and we have to do everything that we can to push back the darkness, to push back the evil," Brooks says, "And the way that we do that is showing the love of Christ in very practical, meaningful ways" (Aaron, 2021). Hence, Salaberrios and Brooks want to offer more than just community-based services and resources as a means of violence prevention and intervention. Those resources and tactics will not work when, ultimately, this is a spiritual battle for people's souls.

Black Pastoral Influence on Social Issues

Race impacts the collective efficacy concerning pastoral pursuits to end gun violence in urban areas. Research has proven that gun violence is experienced in "racially divergent ways" (Armstrong & Carlson, 2019). There are racial differences in how people of racial groups speak to children, anticipate emergency preparedness, address their congregations, and even work with other clergy. It is believed that in most White communities, gun violence is not an issue, nor is it seen as "their issue". So, neither the community nor congregations give attention to the gun

violence crisis. Gun violence becomes an issue when other racial and ethnic communities begin to infringe on their (the white American's) rights and freedoms with gun reform advocacy. These racial differences along with other factors that shape people's perspective on guns, such as political ideologies, culture, gender, and geography, have filtered into the church.

In the article "God and Guns," Kimberly Winston (2021) details the two perspectives of American clergy—a White male and the other a Black female—who have survived experiences of gun violence. Rev. Frank Pomeroy, the White male and the pastor of First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs in Texas, buried his fourteen-year-old daughter and 25 other congregants after a gunman opened fire, letting off seven hundred rounds on a Sunday morning inside of his church. Similarly, the Reverend Sharon Risher buried her mother and two cousins along with six others after a gunman fired at least 70 shots during prayer time at a Wednesday night Bible Study at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. After suffering tragic losses, both Pastors Pomeroy and Risher walked away from their experiences with a different perspective on how to respond to gun violence.

The Rev. Risher has dedicated her life to advocating for gun reform, seeking to have strict gun laws passed to reduce access and increase security and screening measures for weapon sales. Rev. Pomeroy committed himself to training and arming his congregation to protect themselves and their congregation as a measure of disaster prevention. Proudly, Rev. Pomeroy wears his firearm in the pulpit. In response to Rev. Risher's convictions, Rev. Pomeroy responded, "And I would pray for her. Not to change her mind so much as that hopefully myself or someone like me is there to protect her when we are needed because she wouldn't be able to protect herself" (Winston, 2021).

Pomery and Risher's polar views are not new; there have been long-standing differences between gun empowerment and gun control. Often Pew Reports show vastly different responses among Black and White Americans with regards to satisfaction, expectation, and priorities. The 2013 Pew Report, regarding outcome satisfaction of the Zimmerman trial, showed for many Whites, the case may have been merely another murder trial. For African Americans, it was a reckoning with the realities of being Black in America (Armstrong & Carlson, 2019). Per the Pew Research Center's 2017 survey, 4 in 10—highest of any religious group—white evangelicals own a gun. Additionally, 74% of all gun owners in the United States agree that rights to gun ownership are essential to their sense of freedom (Winston, 2021). On the other hand, other religious groups that are known to be predominantly African American and more involved in community action may advocate for sanctions on gun ownership. Minorities have historically had difficulty advocating their desires or positioning themselves for or against an issue, even though everyone has the right to do so.

In "Living and Dying in Mental Health: Guns, Race, and the History of Schizophrenic Violence", Jonathan M. Metzl (2016) explains how scientific research on schizophrenia helped discredit minority leaders by labeling them with mental illness. Substantial research confirmed schizophrenic behavior to Black civil rights and political leaders of movements in the 1960 and 1970s as a cultural disposition. Hostility, violence, mania, and other dangerous behavior characterized civil rights advocacy. Black schizophrenia was resolutely linked with Black Power, perpetuating long-standing stereotypes of crazy Black men (Metzl, 2016).

The knee-jerk reaction is to mistake their boldness to speak up with anger and aggression when African Americans cry out regarding an issue. Even verbal outrage is often considered

disrespectful, violent, and unnecessary. It is as if other communities, specifically white communities, are committed to misunderstanding and misdiagnosing Black plight, especially disparaging and disproportionate rates of gun victims and gun offenders in Black communities (Armstrong & Carlson, 2019). This can impact the confidence and morale of African Americans seeking to end gun violence in their community, knowing that other community groups stand opposed to them.

Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott presented gun violence as a heart issue: “One could hold a perspective that guns are not the problem; instead, it is “hearts without God, homes without discipline, and communities without values” (Merino, 2018). Therefore, he explains, the answer to the problem with gun violence is to strengthen the Second Amendment rights for law-abiding citizens. These comments appear ill-informed and ignorant of the complaints of Black activists who recognize the history of racial zoning and the creation and purposeful increase of “Black on Black” violence due to deplorable community conditions and unaffordable costs of living. Further, most gun shops are not in Black communities; weapons are filtered into these communities after being purchased in White communities. Shane Claiborne, a white Christian activist living in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia, presents a unique perspective in comparison to Abbott.

Claiborne believes that all Christians can and should play a role in the end of gun violence. He considers the character of Christ, encouraging people to choose the cross rather than the gun as one means, “I am willing to die” and the other means, “I am willing to kill” (Winston, 2021). Similarly, McClintock (2019) believes people of faith need to demand an end to killing and proclaim a theology that affirms resistance rather than sacrifice.” Further, Drick Boyd had a

change of perspective with regards to gun violence, realizing gun violence advocacy was much deeper than gun access after spending a full day in jail after protesting with Black and Brown detainees, authors, and activists. He found it contingent on understanding the life experience and the perspective of the person holding the gun (D. Boyd, personal communication, December 7, 2021). Healing communities afflicted by gun violence requires presence—even the compassionate presence of a White male living out of the city—to contribute practical and meaningful efforts to the fight against gun violence (Gusterson, 2013). “Sometimes the best recovery plan involves turning pain into protest and prevention,” McClintock (2019) explains. She adds that building a hopeful future requires people to shout out not only in anguish but also in protest (McClintock, 2019).

The Black Church’s Influence in the Field of Criminology

In 2021, African American clergy from across the nation filled the courtroom for the Kyle Rittenhouse trial that tried a then 17-year-old White-male who fatally shot two people and injured another with an AR-15-style rifle the summer prior. They provided an agitating presence that advocated for justice, dignity over systemic oppression, and an end to gun violence although silent during proceedings. The Black Church will respond and its religious leaders will serve at the forefront when the prominent voice of a national or regional outcry is African American. Mental health counselors, and trained specialists, it is expected of Black pastors to be there; they are called upon to promote wellness and prevention, attend to the community’s most pressing needs, and address civil unrest with a non-legal approach, providing community care to the vulnerable and comfort to those mourning quite often, and in the place of the police (Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975).

The Rev. Leslie Watson Malachi (2013) explains “In Preaching Gun Safety, in The Pews,” that many African American pastors have been on the battlefield for a long time and recognize the need to move the spiritually and physically wounded to a place of advocacy and victory. She, having attended the Los Angeles convening of the African American Church Gun Control Coalition, declared “Just as clergy must comfort the wounded, clergy must be the change agents for a ground-up movement to free our streets from violence” (Malachi, 2013). It is expected of the community and its leaders to adopt measures that will prevent gun violence. Therefore, when they do not, it becomes the pastor’s role to respond with stories that present the pain of gun violence and encourage others in their communities to do the same. Urban African American clergy take on the role of bridge-makers by connecting the community and police.

There is a Germantown shopping center; it has a portable streetlight with a running camera as well as a marked police car. A thirty-seven-year-old pastor reveals, “I know that officer [sitting in the marked car]. I know all the officers,” while walking with me toward the shopping center, which neighbors his church. He further explained that he is a city police chaplain and is selective about who he tells. He needs to know both the people living in his community as well as the people serving his community, because he believes, “we all need to work together to address the violence in our city” (Anonymous clergy person, personal communication, n.d.). Similarly, a series of research studies showed the city’s reliance, specifically with regards to police intervention, on the Black Church to build stronger community ties by bringing “Biblical truth, honesty, accountability, and transparency into areas where police have poor race relations” (Winship et al., 2008; Brunson et al., 2013).

In “Losing Faith? Police, Black Churches, and the Resurgence of Youth Violence in Boston,” Winship et al. (2008) report on the Boston Miracle—the early 1990s police-clergy partnership that significantly reduced gang-related homicides among young Black males. This partnership proved the need for intentional cooperation, collaboration, and coordinated responses from a team of clergy and police although the success of the program was short-lived and the Operation Cease Fire project that facilitated the work of the police-clergy initiative ended in 2000. In Operation Cease Fire, clergy were not just involved; they took the lead. Winship et al. (2008), explains that the Ten Point Coalition of activist Black clergy spearheaded this approach. Unfortunately, the strategy weakened along with the police-clergy relationship. The clergy and police were seemingly not of the same mind, and police were critiqued as being less intentional and less vigilant of statistics (Winship et al., 2008). This made it difficult for them to work together to carefully coordinate a plan against the rise in serious violent crimes, thus preventing further efforts.

Not every police-ecclesial partnership succeeds. South Carolina Pastor Carey Grady has a different perspective of the clergy’s role with police; he wants the city to take the lead. In “The City of Columbia Must Act Now on Gun Violence, The Time for Just Talk is Over”, Grady (2021) states that he among one thousand and one hundred people have already researched a solution to end gun violence in the city of Columbia. Yet, the law enforcement and political leaders have turned their back on them by failing to attend the city’s largest annual gathering known as Nehemiah Action which addresses prevalent community concerns. Church leaders are petitioning other community leaders, especially the police, to display leadership by bringing in experts to conduct a problem analysis “so that [they] have clear next steps to address this

problem” (Grady, 2021). However, in an illogical response, African American clergy are being made responsible for Black-on-Black crime in their communities and instructed to preach “stop shooting and start snitching” from the pulpit to an audience that does not attend church.

Unfortunately, most clergy are disconnected from people with or using guns, reports the Rev. Melvin Maxwell, the senior pastor of East Friendship Baptist Church (Hamil, 2013).

Nevertheless, city leadership needs to have strong ties with clergy to address gun violence since the Black Church is central and essential to community life.

Today, urban areas have a high density of churches, and church attendance remains high, in comparison to other areas. Churches serve as a gateway. In, “We Trust You, But Not That Much: Examining Police–Black Clergy Partnerships to Reduce Youth Violence,” Brunson et al. (2013) notes that scholars have long recognized the persistent problem of fragile police-minority relations. Still, they have paid less attention to the church’s role as a potent social institution. It is likely that congregants and even community members would cooperate with the police if given pastoral approval. Further, Braga and Brunson (2015) found that police sensitivity would likely strengthen police and community relationships. They state that the use the umbrella term “Black on Black crime” helped to disproportionately represent African Americans as victims and offenders, arrest African Americans for offenses, and over-present African Americans as shooting victims.

The classification of Black-on-Black crime is unfair and devaluing. It creates a false narrative that victims are not randomly selected but are intended targets due to their involvement in illegal activity and lawless behavior. This slanted representation leads to community mistrust and a lack of cooperation with the police. Black residents want police in their neighborhoods.

However, they want them to come in with the intentions of getting to know them and providing appropriate services to their communities rather than applying “indiscriminate and aggressive police enforcement response to a broad range of Black people” (Braga & Brunson, 2015). Braga and Brunson (2015) have studied the lived experiences of victims, community members, and civil servants and present the essential role urban African American pastors and the Black Church play, along with police, in responding to urban gun violence and major crimes.

In a different matter, Brunson et al. (2013) noted that scholars have long recognized the persistent problem of fragile police-minority relations. Still, per “In We Trust You, But Not That Much: Examining Police–Black Clergy Partnerships to Reduce Youth Violence,” scholars have paid less attention to the church’s role as a potent social institution. In areas where the political institutions and police departments have strained relationships with the community, oftentimes social institutions such as churches may have strained relationships with the community, as well. Therefore, the church and police may be able to come together, although the church and community may not. In the review of a 2012 study by socialist and Harvard researcher Robert J. Sampson, Brunson et al. (2013) discovered that the impact and legacy of concentrated disadvantage in Black communities have made it difficult for churches alone to establish the trust among local residents needed to facilitate collective action. Simply, just because a church is located in a particular community does not mean that its interests coincide with that community or that its parishioners necessarily live in that community.

Banks (2016) and Winston (2021) suggest the polar differences between Black and White pastors and differing perspectives of racial groups hinder efforts to reduce or end gun violence although White participation is not at a total lack in local projects to help reduce and prevent gun

violence. White Americans have supported local causes to end gun violence in urban communities such as with Project H.O.O.D. Specifically, in Philadelphia, there are initiatives where, as explained by Boyd, where White pastors protested alongside Black pastors in an effort to raise up voices against urban gun violence (D. Boyd, personal communication, December 7, 2021). Boyd (2021) has also through academia offered solution-based perspectives on gun violence such as through his article, “The Role of Faith in Addressing Gun Violence”.

Black pastors can pride themselves in being a part of the legacy of the Black Church, which has greatly helped to alleviate and serve community crises, including violent crimes despite previous findings related to infighting amongst themselves and finding it difficult to improve trust with police and local leadership (Banks, 2013; Brunson et al, 2013; Imani, 2020; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Clergy have asserted influence in social and political arenas in a concerted effort (Gardener, 2021). Research has also provided great emphasis on the need for political intervention and reform at the community level (Curry, 2013; Gardener, 2021). Clergy intervention is at the policy level or through the provision of community-based services, helping stakeholders and non-church leaders share in vision, responsibility, and costs of ending gun violence in their communities (Gusterson, 2013; McClintock, 2019).

The Bible itself demonstrates criminology’s connection to theology and gospel values undergird preventive efforts. Scripture informs the church that God employs servants to keep order and to punish those who chose not to live right (Romans 13:4). Still, gun violence has not been fully addressed through the theological field and scholars have not placed much emphasis on the field for study. A gun theology has yet to emerge although Black Clergy offer a prophetic voice to conversations around the topic of gun violence and serve as vital community

stakeholders. Clergy serve as advisors and thought leaders in other fields of practice and study, such as human services, public health, criminology, and community planning.

The Black Church continues to lay out its expectations of clergy by educating, electing, and equipping its leaders. However, the community's expectation and pastor's lived experience are two different things. Studies show how clergy share in the vision and responsibility of gun violence prevention efforts, whereas little to no study has focused on what it costs clergy to share in this responsibility. Further, while the history of the Black Church provides accounts of the prestige, progress, and performance of its leaders, it does not speak to their burdens.

Holistically, Are Urban Black Pastors Hurting?

This section attempts to explore how pastors experience trauma for themselves and with others. The entire personhood of a pastor—both his public and private life, his mind, body, and soul, and his overall health—is impacted by grief and traumatic events. Trauma can be the result of living under abusive or unsafe conditions that are long term, with no known endpoint (Yoder, 2015). Trauma is described as chronic when it is longstanding and is typically associated with war. Another cause of trauma is the ongoing, structural violence of the economic, legal, and social systems which result in people's "basic human needs not being met" (Yoder, 2015, p. 12). Social and environmental conditions created by gun violence can turn a community into a war zone. Yoder (2015) explains that these conditions, even if it is a surge, are often ignored or overlooked by people of more privilege because they are not directly impacted by the violence. Escalation does not always create national concerns; however, expansion of the problem into other communities and containment issues often rallies external stakeholders.

van der Kolk (2015) explains how trauma reshapes an individual in ways that are paralyzing; the person internalizes, “there is nothing I can do.” Consequently, the person is unable to take action and respond to critical community crisis that Black pastors face. Given the distressing and horrendous experiences of trauma, pastors may be experiencing powerlessness and conditions that are mistaken as overwhelming expectations. The surge of gun violence adds an increasing amount of trauma added to already stressful life situations. The consequence is that pastors become frozen, powerless, trapped and resigned to the shame of not knowing where to begin or how to approach gun violence (van der Kolk, 15). Herman (2015) also discusses immobility or inability to function due to trauma. It can be onset by failed coping skills where individuals and even communities find themselves powerless, helpless, and hopeless against extenuating circumstances and events.

Urban African American pastors navigate the communities they serve through the complexities of gun violence trauma. Trauma experienced at the community level can be described as historical, intergenerational, collective, and chronic. Malachi (2013), Moore (2000), and Robinson (2016) explain that pastors suffer with the community amid gun violence. However, the pastor’s experience with community trauma may be different. When a community leader or stakeholder experiences trauma with the people it is known as shared trauma (Yoder, 2015). The concept of shared trauma, although not intentionally dismissing the experience of the pastor as a co-victim, seemingly fragments and forces the pastor to pick a distinct role. The entire personhood of a pastor and the interconnectedness of his pastoral and private lives enriches his witness and ministry to others. However, per this study, most co-researchers reported auto-pilot experiences to be their default reaction to trauma. Similarly, auto-pilot has been described by

pastors as a denial of self when navigating a tragic or stressful situation. The pastor must put aside his personal feelings and needs in order to lead. Auto-pilot mode is a form of workaholism; it demonstrates signs of acting-in which is a sign of turning trauma energy onto oneself (Yoder, 2015).

“In that moment,” a pastor shares, “It’s not about me. It’s about the people and their needs” (Anonymous pastor, personal communication, 2022). Ministers are called upon to fill a pastoral role when notified of a community tragedy, even for a close friend or relative. They are expected to shepherd people through the crisis and serve them as the comforter and preacher. There is no room for vulnerability and shared sentiments of pain. A pastor “has a job to do.” Therefore, he may not just have to function in a mode that suppresses his emotions. He may also have to perform in a way that causes others to minimize their pain and feelings rather than hold those emotions and work through them. For instance, the expectations and obligations for a pastor to fulfill are leadership actions that inspire and encourage people to be strong (often without fear), rejoice that the loved one is in heaven (despite the earthly predicament), and to move on (without retaliation). Auto-pilot is a traumatic reaction to the on-going and surging gun-violence within the city. A person may lose his mind after an experience of a single traumatic event, whereas “those who undergo long-term trauma often feel they have lost themselves” (Herman, 2015, p. 158; Yoder, 2015, p. 27).

In *Braided Selves*, Pamela Cooper-White (2011) makes room for a pastor’s full, authentic self and “invites contemplation of the weaving together of multiple objectives in the experience of self and others” (p. 9). Her concept of multiplicity allows for a person to embrace being many selves in many contexts. Similarly, a pastor can thrive fully when they gain an understanding of

their whole selves and the interconnectedness of the various parts of themselves—the parts of themselves that shows up and suffers with the people in their community and the many parts of themselves that are grieving and are struggling to overcome it.

There is an expectation for Black people, especially women, to be resilient and long-suffering despite the centuries of great loss that they have suffered from losing their children to slave trades to today's gun activity. Cheryl Woods-Giscombe (2016) criticizes the superwoman schema—the preconceived notion that Black women have unlimited strength. This is like the strong black woman myth driven by racist models and slavery, and that plays into people's "need" to believe that Black women do not feel pain like others and have the same human needs (Boehm, 2010; Walker-Barnes, 2014). African Americans, especially women, are burdened with the weight of preserving themselves, the family, and the community. Therefore, it is expected of them to be independent and to prioritize the needs of others, all while maintaining high levels of success despite limited resources. Also, they should have no vulnerabilities, and during weak moments, it is most proper to conceal emotions. This can create unhealthy methods of coping such as disassociation. van der Kolk (2015) describes dissociation as the essence of trauma; it is a means for getting through highly distressing situations. Similarly, Freud's notion of double consciousness is a form of survival mode that allows the brain and body to shut off its senses and awareness (Herman, 1992). Both are trance-like states that enable individuals to make it through (or survive) terrifying and stressful situations without feeling anything.

The Black Church can miss opportunities to provide its clergy and church leaders spaces to mourn and tell their story. In "A Widow's Perspective on Grief in the Black Church", Sarah

Robinson (2016) reports that her grief was stifled by other women in the church. She shares that she could no longer put on a brave face and broke down at her husband's second funeral. "The Baptist mothers of the church," she recalls, "were trying to shake me out of it, telling me that I was stronger than that and I had to get it together" (Robinson, 2016). When reviewing several sermons from African American clergy, Jennifer Shepard Payne (2008) uncovered that most Pentecostal ministers did not handle the mental health needs of their congregants with the best care, either. Instead, they condemned insurmountable stress and depression as a weakness and promoted, "saints don't cry". Like soldiers, it is considered in some fashion to be dishonorable of a pastor to exhibit weakness or inferiority (Herman, 1992). Stress, depression, one's inability to overcome grief or suppress tears are condemnable conditions in the Black Church (Payne, 2008). However, a part of trauma recovery is becoming familiar and embracing the [trauma] one holds in their body (Herman, 1992).

In Payne's study (2008) a Pentecostal Bishop shared, "We teach 'saints don't cry'. Well, if you get sick enough, you will cry. Have a bad cramp, you will cry. There are some things... and I found that crying became therapeutic for me." Some theological perspectives dictate that church parishioners who have been saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Ghost should be free from weaknesses of the sort. There should be no sin, fear, worry, or depression in the parishioner's life. Further, the parishioner should not cry when you have the Prince of Peace in your life (Payne, 2008). Nor should you choose to be angry or mad; because choosing so denies the choice to praise God. It is highly likely that both cultural and spiritual pressures to keep up appearances and to avoid stereotypes—crazy Black man, angry black woman, unfaithful, or even weak—impedes Black clergy's ability to cry out for justice or even to lament. Anxiety, clinical

depression, hysteria, as well as character disorders are all psychological and physical consequences of one's failure to properly address grief (Moore, 2017; Tedeschi, R. G. & Moore, B. A., 2016).

An example of Clergy Trauma

On a Sunday in April of 2022, only hours after his baptism, sixteen-year-old Demari Jackson of Fort Myers, Florida was murdered in his church clothes. Malachi (2013) explains what it is like for African American clergy to pastor a congregation: “[We] walk with our congregants from birth to death,” she says. “Too often we bury children and young adults whom we have baptized, prepared for college, or spoke with on Sunday morning only to receive a call on Sunday evening” (Malachi, 2013). African American clergy have heard the voices of mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers who have lost loved ones at movie theaters, elementary schools, in drive-by shootings, or who were simply “at the wrong place at the wrong time.” The clergy suffer their own pain and grieve for the people within their own families that have been killed due to gun violence. They may even have an array of childhood trauma bundled up inside of them. However, they are not always allowed to mourn nor are they given the space and safety to mourn (Woods-Giscombe, 2016; Robinson, 2016).

Identifying An Acceptable Grieving Process

Penelope Moore's (2000) “A Profile of Bereavement Supports in African American Congregations”, leverages knowledge of the church serving as an influential social hub and African Americans underutilizing bereavement services to her advantage in her study. She interviewed pastors and church leaders to gain a sense of how the African American churches

provide support for their congregants to help counselors serve more people within the Black Community. Other studies have shown that most African Americans will seek bereavement support and general counseling if their pastor approves (Brunson et al, 2013). Pastors may be inclined to do the same—seek counseling services and other support—if their congregation showed approval.

Clergy are often left out of the grieving process, even when it is a personal occurrence although sharing in the trauma. Robinson (2016) explains that the behaviors of well-meaning members of the church create a victim profile, especially for clergy and clergy spouses. The profile seeks to shake the victim out of grief and shape them up to appear stronger outwardly than they may have felt inwardly. It coerces women to live into the myth of the strong Black woman (Boehm, 2010). The pressure for Robinson (2016) to present herself as a strong Black woman seemed greater because she held a prominent and important position in the church. So, admittedly, she decided to put on a front and felt an obligation to keep others unsuspecting of her pain. “I was depressed, alone and bitter,” she says (Robinson, 2016). Robinson (2016) was also now unemployed; she clearly needed help in every area of her life after the traumatic loss of her husband. Yet, as a Black woman and a ministry leader, she did not feel as though she could grieve or live out a process that made her appear weak when people were expecting her to be strong.

Robinson (2016) allowed herself to be a part of a congregation that did not treat her like she was the victim or someone who had experienced a traumatic loss. She decided to seek help for herself when she noticed that her daughter was engaging in self-harm. She declares, “Prayer just would not do” (Robinson, 2016). She considers the Black church to be a place of escape,

inspiration, fellowship, and unity for the soul. Still, she advocates for professional help outside of the theological field and encourages people not to be afraid to seek help outside of the church. Adam Taylor's (2021) presentation on grief, which urges the church to model lament, employs pastors to create space for those who are grieving. Pastors miss out on an opportunity to offer (shared trauma) space and outlets that make room for themselves (grieving clergy) if they are unable to implement this model in a way that allows for co-mourning or suffering-with approaches. There needs to be a dedicated space or resources to help clergy grieve and suffer-with others since clergy serve in a distinct role and congregants view them differently.

In summary, black grief in general seems to be under attack. There is an expectation of community resilience despite the higher likelihood, in comparison to White people and other minority groups, that a Black child or young adult son will become a victim of homicide (Buchanan, 2011; Gusterson, 2013; Light & Ulmer, 2016; McClintock, 2019). Gun violence sits under an umbrella for urban grief known as Black-on-Black Crime, reducing the issue to only a Black community issue rather than a larger societal problem (Braga & Brunson, 2015). Most people of privilege, influence, and power that are not proximate to inner city conditions of gun violence, have yet to see the need for intervention (Yoder, 2015). Hence, burying Black people and many of their children are community norms that have been resigned to local issues and lack national outrage—responses that lead to support in reserving tragedy. Long-suffering seems to be the most generous attribute of both the Black Church and Black community. Non-liberating theologies subject the Black community to long-suffering as they pray and patiently await prioritization (Cone & West, 2018; Greenberg, 2004; Holden, 2021). Consequently, Black leaders, such as clergy, bear the burden of seeking a resolution.

Black clergy are also subjected to chronic, community trauma. They experience trauma like any other member within the community (Yoder, 2015). They are among the population of people that experience fear, anticipation, and preparation which also leaves them susceptible to a variety of consequential mental health issues. Yet, how are they to respond when help is not coming? What are they to do when you are left to deal with devastating circumstances on your own? Resiliently, they pick yourself up from their own bootstraps and find their own way just as their ancestors did, coming out of the post-slavery era (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Littlefield, 2005; Ncurrie, 2021). African American pastors, their congregants, and the community are, admirably, able to demonstration of strength and push past the pain, although it is at the expense of adequate treatment following traumatic experiences.

How Holy People Choose to Heal

This section explores opportunities for urban Black pastors to experience healing and transformation as it relates to gun-violence. Healing is a restoration process, repairing, and replacing the person or relationship that has been damaged by any form of pain. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) has a report describing the factors that impact a person's health. Similarly in 2010, Wespeth Benefits and Investments (2011) released a report that identified thirteen factors that influence clergy health and well-being through a *Church System's Task Force Report*. Among the listing of factors were work-life balance and existential burdens of ministry, such as an inability to receive healthcare because of work demands, feeling obligated to carry the weight of others emotional and spiritual burdens, as well as being overwhelmed by the needs of others. During Southgate's (2021) "Annotated Interview with Sarah Horsman," she discusses a pastor's inability to acknowledge that he or she is overwhelmed. In an example, she

shares that a pastor who provided 24-hour care during a distressing event described the experience as exhilarating (Southgate, 2021). Later, accepting that it was not his intention to describe it as such, she explains that that is not a normal response to tragic and unexpected events. She maintains that caregivers need to stay in a place of low arousal and get to a place where they are not permanently overstretched (Southgate, 2021). This will help them enact strategies and be better prepared for unexpected events.

Two other factors of clergy health factor include the pastor's ability to live authentically and have a social life; when a pastor feels as though he or she is unable to be their authentic self or connect with their community and peers to discuss their personal issues, this too impacts their well-being (Wespath Benefits and Investments (Wespath), 2011). Similarly, Herman (1992) reports that rap groups that were developed for soldiers suffering psychological trauma of war and quickly swept across the nation. The purpose of the groups was to help soldiers find comfort in a community of their peers with similar experiences. It also promoted awareness of what they were going through which, in turn, can reduce the stigma that keeps people from seeking needed help.

The church has been a place of support and solace for when individuals and communities are confronted with personal and national tragedies; the pastor is pivotal in that support (Gardener, 2021). A safe space the bedrock to trauma healing. In *The Heart of Trauma*, Badenoch (2010) persists that people need meaningful relationships and support systems for opportunities, from a cognitive standpoint, for people to begin to understand their experiences of fear and pain as it relates to trauma. In light of the trauma healing literature, however, the Wespath (2011) *Church Systems Task Force Report* misses an opportunity to speak about grief.

Also, the only mention of concerns for a pastor's safety in the report were related to his environment—adequate housing. Violence, mass violence, loss, witnessing death, or structural violence are not stressors embedded within the factors of clergy and church health. Research is limited to how trauma impacts the church as an institution.

Trauma does not just impact the health and physiology of its leaders but the health of the organization's structure no matter how resilient it strives to be. The Black Church is a social construct; however, it often demonstrates characteristics of organizational trauma. A church can also become overwhelmed, weakened, made vulnerable, and rendered helpless and damaged (Yoder, 2015). Although research is lacking on how gun violence and trauma impacts the health of the church and its leaders, naming pertinent issues may lead to alleviation and resolve. A primary issue is that even in the face of trauma, neither the pastor nor the church is allowed to be the patient. In *The Stature of Waiting*, Vanstone (2020) describes the response of a person, in the prime of his life, which has been struck down by a serious accident. The first reaction may be to get up out of the situation. “And when the sudden pain or illness grips him,” Vanstone (2020) explains, “he may first attempt to conceal it or ignore it and to ‘struggle on’” (p. 34). However, the person will struggle without avail and eventually must “give in” and wait for help; he becomes the patient. Subsequently, that person’s status changes and so does his relationship with the world around him. This person’s new status solicits help.

It seems the concept of “giving in” is not available for clergy; pastors are often put in ridiculously complex, unavailing, and impossible circumstances without being able to depend on others for support. Vanstone (2020) suggests that not every activity has a valuable product. Therefore, applauding a pastor for not giving up or giving in to their pain does not always

produce the best intended results for their own well-being, the church, or the community impacted by the church and pastor's work. Another issue is that solicitation for help goes unanswered. Black pastors (internal community stakeholders) are suppressing their grief related to traumatic events and external community stakeholders (including non-Black congregations) are ignoring gun-related trauma. Tom Skinner rebuked the conservative evangelicals for lacking social concern in a 1971 address to the American Baptist Convention (Moberg, 2007). Most denominations are split between other-worldly and this-worldly emphasis and, ultimately, it impacts their levels of compassion and how they respond to issues impacting contemporary societies.

Pastors need compassion and support for overcoming their grief as a personal issue and alleviating or reducing trauma as a social concern. In "Responding to Disaster in an Afro-Caribbean Congregation," Gardener (2021) explains that while people may share the details of the events that are happening, rarely are the inner experiences of a tragedy shared. However, compounded community issues compromise the mental health of [Black] pastors and leaders (Holness, 2022). For instance, a pastor may get to work on a tragedy by taking a deep breath and resiliently pressing forward (Boehm, 2010). Yet, two months later, they are struggling (Southgate, 2021). Although pastors are employed to be caretakers and counselors without proper professional training, they may overlook opportunities to decompress and the benefits of care and self-care after a crisis (Herman, 2002; Southgate, 2021). They are good at finding what they need (to cope in that moment); yet poor care habits put them in the same situation as a trauma patient that is not seen by a counselor for weeks, months, and even years after an incident

(Southgate, 2021). On-going trauma can also impede processes to decompress or seek sufficient relief, such as mourning (Yoder, 2015).

A Trauma Healing Model

In *Trauma and Healing*, Judith Herman (2015) introduces three stages of recovery from trauma and post-traumatic stress. In step one, the counselor works with the trauma patient to restore the safety and trust that has been shattered. The process of helping a person find safety and become grounded serves to put distance between the person and the instability created by on-going or previous trauma. Through this process, the person realizes that they are in the present and the traumatic event is in the past. Once the trauma patient realizes that the trauma is in the past, the person can look back on it. Hence, they move into stage two: Remembrance and Mourning. Remembering and Mourning requires a person to name the trauma and tell their story or the story of the trauma (Herman, 2015). Grosh-Miller et al. (2021) explains that liturgies are great places for communities to name the trauma. It is an instrument of power. It allows them to reframe their story and see and understand the trauma in a new way (Grosh-Miller et al., 2021). Herman (2015) calls this the trauma patient's (survivor) development of a new mental schema which can replace the bad or painful memory.

Whereas stage one gives back a sense of safety and stability that was shattered, this stage begins to restore what was lost, such as the power and courage that was robbed of the person (Grosh-Miller et al., 2021; Herman, 2015). In "The Health and Human Rights of Survivors of Gun Violence," Buchanan (2011) stated that only 1-3% of survivors used rehabilitation services. This may be connected to survivor's remorse—the guilt or self-blame felt when a person does not experience a loss that someone that has experienced, even though they feel deserving of that

loss. This is evident in Buchanan's (2011) reports that some people do not feel deserving of rehabilitation. There are people who survive gun violence and are second-hand victims to trauma. Even the perpetrator, whether he is physically injured during the act of gun violence not, experiences trauma in some form. The second stage seeks to help a survivor reconstruct beliefs, especially about him or herself. This may allow the victim to consider the choices they did not think they had or to find the power that they lost due to traumatic events occurring long before they pulled the trigger (Hylton, 2022; Markl, 2020).

After the person has mourned the self that was lost and shattered due to the traumatic event, the person is now ready to start his new self which occurs during the third stage, which focuses on reconnection with people, activities, and other aspects of your life. The counselor has helped the trauma patient establish that they are now living in the future having left the trauma behind them in the past; this includes the bad memories of the event and themselves. They are no longer controlled by the trauma, and it does not—not any part of it—need to be a part of the new self they are creating and the new life they hope to begin (Gardener, 2021; Herman, 1992).

Giving In to Grief

After a physically traumatic event, such as a shooting, a person is rushed to the hospital and based on the harm experienced the doctor identifies the condition of the patient. Some patients in stable and non-life-threatening conditions remain in the care for observation to see if the patient physically responds to the harm done. Although the presence and assistance of counselors and mental health providers are often acknowledged, news outlets never seem to share the mental or emotional toll of the patient or if observation relative to the patients' mental health is required. Author C.S. Lewis (2015) details in his book, "A Grief Observed," his own

bravery and ability to face, examine, reflect, and “come to grips” with his personal agony regarding his wife’s death. The event was shattering and created emotional paralysis.

Emotional paralysis can be the initial preoccupation with a person’s loss as well as isolating effects and plunging emotions related to the death. Often, per Lewis’ (2015) own rebuke of himself, this form of grief is selfish—more about the mourner than it was about the deceased. Still, emotional paralysis was evident in the phases of mourning that Lewis (2015) experienced as he sought to overcome and reconcile his grief with faith. Note that emotional paralysis is dissimilar to the shared Black pastor’s experiences of auto-pilot mode. Nevertheless, there are different ways people experience and describe trauma and grief. For example, McClintock (2019) says life is disrupted after trauma, while Dickie (2019) and Herman (2015) describe it as a shattering. Experiences of grief are individual. However, the “Foreword by Madeliene L’Engle” critiques Lewis’ (2015) text as honest and sharing in the elements and feelings of grieving. Similarly, a study of the lived experience of Black pastors as it relates to gun violence can present universally shared descriptions given the honesty of the co-researchers as they describe their experiences with grief. Such a study could also capture the perspectives gained and other accomplishments emerged by the brave decision to face one’s pain.

Lewis (2015) wrestled with understanding who God was and where he was in the midst of his grief as he lived out the experience of life after the death of his wife. Tribble (1984) understands the solitary and intense nature of trauma and terror. She suggests that stories provide substance for present journeys. Her own perspective of traumatic events recounts terror in memoriam, sympathetic to abused women for the sake of helping women victims find justice despite injustices and crimes against them. She accomplishes this using a literary-feminist

approach to Biblical text which often presents a countercultural revelation of God in relation to experienced trauma. “To tell and hear tales of terror,” she says, “is to wrestle demons in the night, without a compassionate God to save us” (Trible, 1984, p. 4). Still, in her interpretations of women victims from ancient Israel, she likens their suffering to Christ. For example, Hagar, the Egyptian slave woman was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Also, the Unnamed Concubine from Bethlehem’s body was broken and given to many. Experiences of grief within faith communities impact the way people understand God as well as how they begin to understand themselves in Christ which can be empowering and liberating.

Communities experience terror related to gun violence in urban cities every day. They walk past memorials, sit beside empty workspaces of a slain peer at work or school, watch reports of violent crime on television, or are only earshot away from the sounds of gunfire at all hours of the day. This trauma creates needs for safety and security (Yoder, 2015). Chosen trauma, specifically the form known as redemptive violence are acts of revenge and retaliation for their own victimization. This is often justified as a method for overcoming terror and regaining security, freedom, pride, and whatever else was lost due to the initial traumatic event. Nevertheless, it creates unhealthy environments of ongoing trauma, anxiety, and fear, which in turn, impacts everything else. Wespeth’s (2011) *Church System’s Task Force* states that, “Health affects the whole connection: family, congregation, community and the wider Church itself.” When trauma or resulting terror is unaddressed, it creates conditions that make it difficult for communities to thrive.

Badenoch’s *Heart of Trauma* (2018) supports Yoder’s (2015) claims that trauma affects a person physiologically, especially when it is unaddressed or unprocessed. Trauma, she says, that

does not “receive the support needed to integrate (sustained abuse, war, neglect) can affect the anatomy of the brainstem,” creating an issue such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Consequently, because parts of the brain dance (work) together, it impacts the whole brain system and impacts people’s ability to relate to others. Still, relationships have redemptive qualities. What was diminished cognitively because of lacked support may not be restored.

However, relationships can bring comfort and support, allowing the injured person to soften his muscles as well as change his heart expansion and breathing patterns.

In *It Didn’t Start with You*, Mark Wolynn (2016) further demonstrates the benefit of naming and processing complaints. A female patient was experiencing the cycle of abject disappointment and the isolation, shame, rejection, and abandonment that went along with it. The cycle was concealed behind adverse childhood experiences and teen pregnancy. Yet, the woman was able to understand a burden deeply and physically felt such as abject disappointment may be merely a projection. Invectives, passed down generationally, are never meant for the child, even if they received personal attacks; they are reflection of the challenging time faced by predecessors (Wolynn, 2016). When the patient received an understanding of this, she was able to come to terms with abject disappointment and respond to it differently. Sometimes, a person may not be able to see the actual problem. Support naming the problem can lead to understanding and overcoming the problem. A person may not be able to resolve the problem or change others; however, the healing associated with naming the problem is that it empowers a person to change how he responds to the problem.

Exploring Grief

In *On Death*, Keller (2020) explains that we are not to take the stoic approach. We are to grieve rather than to default to auto-pilot or resiliently embrace the pain. Keller's (2020) description of a stoic approach seemingly rejects other-worldly theologies. Telling someone, "Now, now, He is with the Lord... He's in heaven now," is not the right response to evil and the unnaturalness of death (Keller, 2020). He provides this evidence using the story of Lazarus, who although he would be raised from the dead, Jesus allowed himself to "grieve with sorrow and anger." As believers experiencing the surge of gun violence, per Keller's suggestions, we have two reasons to reject death as a natural occurrence. Foremost, we know that our bodies were designed to last and not die; death was never supposed to be a part of our lives (Keller, 2020). On the other hand, the nasty normal of ever-increasing fatal gunshot and fatal crime victims should be outrageous and unacceptable. The church should be accepting their grief and working to accomplish something with it—shouting in anguish and protest (McClintock, 2019). This likens Tribble (1984) exploration and outrage of Biblical texts regarding the undue and unnatural deaths of women in ancient Israel.

Theology impacts how people grieve. In *Born to Lament*, Katongole (2017) states that Jesus's cry from the cross was a psalm of lament (Psalm 22:1) that brought full circle God's identification with suffering humanity. The violence and wars across countries in Africa generates the same hopeless responses of African Americans in cities impacted by gun violence, "Where is God?" Katongole (2017) suggests that God, although silent, is a caring God and stands with them in their suffering, lamenting with them. The process of lamenting can help people gain perspective. In the third chapter of the Book of Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah begins to lay out his complaints to God. He had been besieged, weighed down, shut out, dragged,

left, pierced, mocked, broken, trampled, and deprived... (v. 1 – 18). Still, after experiencing God's judgement and receiving the "the rod of the Lord's wrath", Jeremiah brings his beaten and broken body before the Lord with the proclamation that, "Because of your love, we are not consumed" (v 22). Similarly to C.S. Lewis claims, reflection allowed him to overcome his grief through faith in a God Jeremiah recalled God's great love for them. His recollection revived Him and brought him hope during his suffering.

Neglecting opportunities for traumatized people to lament hinders their ability to transition to hope. In *Tragedies and Christian Congregations*, Warner et al. (2021) recounts John Swinton's experience in church the day after the 1998 Omagh Bombing. The church liturgy did not acknowledge or confront the traumatic event; it made no room for "sadness, brokenness, or questioning" (Warner et al., 2021). Swinton recognized the disconnection between sorrow and use of the psalms. Likewise, Kathleen Norris shared that her childhood experiences and Christian upbringing bound her by "the insidious notion that [she] need to be a firm and even cheerful believer" (Warner et al., 2021, p. 168). Teaching children to avoid their pain and replace opportunities to lament with joy and praise can lead to unaddressed trauma that continues to impact their lives even in adulthood. In *The Body Keeps the Score*, van der Kolk (2015) documents the development of Dr. Vincent J. Felitti's Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. He explains that a term study that consisted of 17,421 participants revealed that adverse experiences are interrelated although studied separately. The study proved that incidents of abuse are never stand-alone events and children do not outgrow the effects of these experiences with age (van der Kolk, 2015). This sheds light on the term child criminals.

A variety of factors and experiences stemming from childhood can cause a child to pick up a gun and engage in drug or gang activity. Such factors could be abuse, neglect, basic needs not being sufficiently met, fear, and a loss of pride, dignity, or power. van der Kolk (2015) explains that Dr. Vincent Felitti developed the Adverse Childhood Experience Study in response to experts that critiqued and dismissed findings for a weight loss study. Felitti had discovered that a prior history of sexual trauma dictated the extreme fluctuations of a study participant's weight; the same issue impacted another participant. However, experts considered this finding—exposed root of the problem—to be an excuse for their failed lives (van der Kolk, 2015). Sadly, most experts or stakeholders prove to be unreliable when seeking a resolution because they do not want to accept what may be the problem. In the case of gun violence, urban strife has been attributed to capitalism, racism, and disproportionate access to basic community needs. When exploring the grief of victims, including co-researchers in this study, it is often shared that being unheard, ignored, and not believed has furthered the harm done.

Healing from Grief

Theodicy is the perception and belief in a loving and caring God amid suffering and evil in the world. In *Raging with Compassion*, Swinton (2007) explains that it is very difficult for a human to use his own reason or logic to understand and explain evil. A theoretical approach (the traditional practice of theodicy) is not the best way to come to grips with evil or to resolve the problem of evil for “it does not bring healing or a deeper love for God. Rather, it is the potential source of evil in and on itself” (Swinton, 2007, p. 246). Swinton asserts, however, that there is a way to respond to the problem of evil. “There is an answer [to the problem of evil],” he says, “and it is love” (Swinton, 2007, p. 246). Love is a practical response to the problem of evil. And

when people are lead through practices of lament, forgiveness, thoughtfulness, and hospitality in a loving way, it may not solve their problem with evil, but it will provide a supportive response to suffering.

More supportive responses can be accomplished through our ability to reframe the practice of theodicy and allow it to shape the way churches live faithfully, specifically live out faithful responses to the presence of evil in the world. What might be most beneficial to the Black Church is its ability to “re-member” through small groups. Swinton defines re-membering as the act of being drawn back together again and to restore what has been broken (dismembered) to a whole (Swinton, 2007). “There is a beautiful Scripture in Proverbs that talks about how there is safety in a multitude of counselors,” says Baldwin Gibson (Holness, 2022). The early Christian church that would come together in small groups during times of trouble to share in fellowship and look forward to a time where evil could be overcome. Similarly, the early beginnings of the Black Church, which was birthed in slavery, began in this way. Enslaved African American people could not gather or worship freely unless done so under the supervision of a white person. So, they would run to wooded areas or other places to worship together discreetly.

For a time, the Black Church consisted of informal gatherings of enslaved African Americans in secret places, and in the mid-1700s, the gatherings became less secretive and more visible (Pinn, 2011). In these settings, Black people found their strength and a safe community to “absorb [their grief, pain, and alienation] in ways that were faithful and sustaining” (Swinton, 2007, p. 124). The Black Church can continue and reclaim this practice with a special emphasis on reclaiming lament. Lamenting and re-membering in community supports the African

American faith traditions that likens itself to a crucified Christ. Just as Tribble (1984), likened the concubine woman to a Christ that had been broken and shared to many, sharing in the Eucharist as a community can draw together our broken pieces through lament. Minor crucifixions, our own suffering, conforms us to the likeness of Christ (Mains, 1997). Swinton (2007) says, “the combination of memory and thanksgiving forges a new solidarity which is focused on Jesus, the one who is anointed to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom from the captives” (p. 125; Luke 4:18).

Vanstone (2020) says that not all activity is meaningful even if it appears to bring forth a valuable solution or result. Trauma creates a crossroad; and what needs to be met at the crossroads is love (Bourgeault, 2001). In *Mystical Hope*, Bourgeault (2001) says, “Mystical hope is not tied to a good outcome, to the future. It lives a life of its own, seemingly without reference to external circumstances and conditions” (p. 9). All our deeds, even those spoken, will die. Fortunately, our hope is not contingent upon what we do. It is about who we are—our being—and our ability to be vessels of hope, letting it flow through us from a generous source. While justice seeking, safety, and security are principal elements for achieving trauma healing, the Black Church today can benefit from creating spaces where the community can lament, remember, and to be reconnected to a sustaining hope (Swinton, 2007; Yoder, 2015).

It builds solidarity and friendship when we recognize that other people’s pain may reveal common ground. This cultivates the love that, Swinton suggests, resists evil. Both Swinton (2007) and Nouwen (2010) would agree that this kind of healing in the contemporary church is pastor driven. However, the pastor must be allowed to show up as their authentic and dis-membered self and not do this solely as the minister for, in these settings, it is about presence and

being met—not having your needs met (Bourgeault, 2001). In *The Wounded Healer*, Nouwen (2010) says that the minister cannot keep his own experience of life hidden from the people he wants to help. The minister presents his own wounds not for the sake of street credibility or to say, “Look, I have the same problems, too.” Rather to demonstrate “a constant willingness to see one’s own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition that we all share” (Nouwen, 2010).

Similarly, to Swinton (2007), Nouwen (2010) presents hospitality as a practical approach to healing; it, also, deeply rooted in the Judeao-Christian tradition that allows “salvation to come to us in the form of a tired traveler”. Hospitality opens doors figuratively and intentionally. Going back to the origins of the Christian faith, churches should take down banners that instruct their worshippers not to cry. Instead, they should encourage them to become what it truly means to be a saint—an emblem of immortality. “That’s what Jesus was,” says Mains (1997) as she represents the voice of John Irving who says our character and behavior needs to be reformed so that we are emotionally moved by the ills in society. The emotional response is indignation—outrage—and that, she says, is heroic. Saints are called to be resilient; they are designed intentionally by God to be heroic and that takes practice. It also takes the courage to recognize the times fragmentation is felt instead of resilience.

Hospitality allows pastors to create comforting places for congregants to realize their pain. In response, the congregants should make the space comfortable for the pastor, welcoming him or her to show up fully in their true, dismembered form. When church communities are open to this form of hospitality the pastor can help the community live out healing experiences where Jesus comes to anxious disciples, and they receive power or where closed doors become open

minds. Nouwen (2010) suggests that there is an appropriate way for a pastor to show up as their true self within the community—conscious to avoid superficial relativity. Although possibly beneficial to the healing process of the community, this guideline still gives a limit to the pastor's engagement with co-sufferers. Where can a pastor openly say, "I am undone and have totally lost it?" There are so many working communities and task forces directing a clergy response to problems of evil in their communities. It does not always prove to be effective and often creates competition and the burden of sustaining activities. There needs to be a community for pastors to find rest and friendships that can lead to faithful, healthy lives and ministries. The overall health of pastors impacts everything and improving the health of church leaders is essential to maintaining the strength, vitality and reach of the Church's mission and ministry (Wespath Benefits and Investments, 2011).

In summary, the resolution for pastoral grief amid the surge of gun violence presented speaks to fruitfulness at the psychological level although it is facilitated through practical means, such as reconnection, love, presence, community, hospitality. Practical responses such as justice seeking, and truth-telling as outspoken activities seemingly overshadow the need for personal, private care and settings where actual truth-telling and justice seeking begin. Healing is not necessarily about finding a resolution for the problem; it is about resolving your ability to be impacted by the problem. This is best accomplished by being invited to safe spaces that allow people to discover the actual problem in the community. Sometimes, the person is distracted by an issue that is exasperating the problem but that is not the true cause to one's trauma and grief and needs help properly identifying the problem (Wolynn, 2016).

Naming and calling out a problem aren't enough. The benefit of naming the problem in community is that you can find solidarity, face it with support, and persist on rising above it through traditional or re-imagined means. Healing is driven by hope and love. Hope is not reliant on external elements or outward expectations being met, although the sufferer is still the recipient of it. Together, hope and love allow for the sufferer to engage in community openly and authentically for the sake of sustaining his own life or achieving an unbearable lightness of being (sensations of strength, joy, and satisfaction) (Bourgeault, 2021). Welcoming hope and love into the healing process takes practice as well as the reformation of how believers understand trauma and our relationship with God amid evil and tribulation.

Summary

Black Church and its clergy have always been a part of the solutions to community issues and have served as a chief provider of social support. They have played a vital and vocal role in the fight to end gun violence, speaking up from the pulpit, the polls, and any available platform, as expected. The literature details all the hard work that pastors contribute. Yet, it rarely captures the heart or the experiences of the clergy. The literature also leaves a void in understanding where the public and private life of a minister begin, intersect, and end, namely with regards to gun violence. Further, where are the opportunities for clergy to not only suffer personally and privately but to co-suffer with the community? There is a need for healing models that invite pastors to be present with rather than presently working.

Literature has shown that a true community presence requires a person to show up as his or her whole self. Yet, pastors have experienced a limited ability, if any, to honor their own feelings. Consequently, this has neglected and prolonged clergy trauma as well as impacted their

ability to nurture relationships with community members and other leaders during crisis. Beliefs that “saints don’t cry” have negatively shaped the healing process and environments where healing could thrive. The notion of mental strength often sets a standard for a person in pain to simply move on, choose to stay happy, and not waste time feeling sad. However, strong does not always have to mean resilient. Nor does it mean that you cannot have both Jesus and a therapist—contrary to the longstanding belief that “What goes on in the house stays in the house” (Holness, 2022). Nevertheless, the literature is lacking in theology with regards to outlining the call of the pastor in communities plagued by gun violence or even a Black Church theology on gun violence. The focus tends to position the issue in social and criminal fields although clergy play a critical role in gun violence. The issues are also raised as a matter of justice with regards to the impact of gun violence by culture, gender, race, and location.

African American clergy have extensive experience in urban ministry in Philadelphia, partnering financially and programmatically with the community and other leaders. Pastors have demonstrated a keen ability to assess the issue of urban gun violence as well as make spiritual solutions. Still, there is not a reliable (meaning, consistent across cities and sample groups with proven measures) theological blueprint conceived by religious scholars to address the issue of gun violence. Gun violence is a complex problem with so many contributing factors, not limited to community concerns and the lack of community aid, capitalism, and Covid. This makes for a complex job in which many pastors are under-resourced and under-trained. Addressing gun violence and violent crimes is not traditionally a part of seminary training.

The literature does not speak about self-directed professional development or detail the clergy's experience of growing to understand and serve an area impacted by gun violence. Still,

little speaks to the training needed to address gun violence from the pastoral office. There are guides created by clergy coalitions that provide training or best practices for ministers and congregations to provide social services. Yet, it often leaves out the role of religion and theology with regards to gun violence.

Lastly, research does not speak to what it costs urban African American clergy to serve a community greatly impacted by gun violence. An individual member of the congregation may think that their pastor is well supported, however the literature provides overwhelming evidence that there are not many places where leaders, specifically church leaders, can go to process their own grief. They continue to bear a lot of the stress and pressure of tending to most community needs, not just gun violence, and it impacts their overall health. There were few case studies and findings per the impact of personal burdens or even personal convictions. There is substantial research lacking the details of the personal impact due to their experiences. Clergy undeniably experience the pain of gun violence. Yet, their experience lacks exploration as an individual, collective, or cultural phenomenon. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute such research by uncovering and unpacking the phenomenon of urban African American pastors who are ministering through the current surge of gun violence in Philadelphia.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this phenomenological study regarding the lived experience of urban African American pastors serving the Germantown Section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Edmund Husserl's applied approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the joys and burdens of pastoring and navigating urban communities and congregations through the surge of gun violence. It also explored the emotional experience of pastoral leaders including their convictions, values, and judgements. Together, these processes have provided a method for building an understanding—a sketch of the essence—of Black pastoral ministry in disproportionately underserved neighborhoods that have been devastated and further vilified by the increasing and seemingly insurmountable crisis of gun violence in predominantly Black communities. This chapter will also offer an in-depth discussion about the use of Edmund Husserl's concept of bracketing. Further, the demography of the researcher and co-researchers, an explanation of the procedures and method of analysis, as well as a consideration of ethical concerns are key components of this chapter.

The Research Questions

This study sought to answer to the following research questions: 1) What is the lived experience of an urban African American pastor serving Philadelphia during the surge of gun violence? and 2) How are Black Pastors Facing the Surge of Gun Violence in Philadelphia?

The Research Design

The chosen design is a qualitative study to explain the phenomenon, relying on the perception of each pastor's experience with gun violence. Both qualitative and quantitative studies are useful in understanding data pertaining to research participants; however, each design

examines a different type of data. Quantitative designs allow for a researcher to analyze statistics and focus on tangible, numerical data whereas qualitative designs are not as structured.

Qualitative research is a collection of non-numerical data such as words and images; this could make it harder for the researcher to organize the data in graphs and charts or to catch trends, projections, and correlations. A quantitative design may miss the essence and ignore the context or disposition of a participant. However, the qualitative design uses non-numerical data to help better explain the numerical data, strengthening and even confirming assumptions and theories.

There are already factual results regarding the surge of gun violence in Philadelphia. Also, quantitative data in the form of public information is available to make correlations between the number of churches and the rise in the number of shootings in the Germantown Section of Philadelphia by year. The purpose of this study is to understand how pastors, especially in areas saturated with religious houses of worship, are responding to the surge of gun violence. This study does not seek to understand pastoral activities; for instance, if pastors or their presence should accomplish positive change. Certainly, a quantitative design could measure ministerial performance or community satisfaction with regards to the role of pastors in gun violence. However, those would be the wrong measurements used to examine a pastor's lived experience with regards to gun violence.

In *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work*, author and researcher Robert E. Stake (2010) explains that a qualitative study is better suited to gain insight and garner solutions for facts that need further definition. For instance, we see and can assess what pastors are doing in response to gun violence, but we cannot see how they are doing mentally and emotionally, nor can we make connections between how personal and private responses affect public-facing and

professional responses. A qualitative design can help explore such a phenomenon by relying on and allowing people to share the perspectives and perceptions of their experience to bring forth an explanation. Researchers need their co-researchers to make truthful and subjective admissions, since qualitative data relies on what the participants share verbally, visually, or in print.

A sampling method is the process in which a researcher studies a population by collecting evidence and data from a representative group of participants (Peoples, 2021). It allows a part of a population to represent the entire population. I will select a systematic sampling strategy for this study and collect data that consists of stories, concepts, meaning interpretations, and opinions. My sample size consists of seven urban African American pastors from the Germantown Section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The pastors were selected because their churches are within the same 5-block radius in the Germantown Section of Philadelphia and, per the city's *Gun Violence Crisis Map*, that section has experienced escalating levels of gun activity and fatalities. These pastors serving this section were selected to represent the whole city of Philadelphia and possibly urban centers nationally and abroad.

It is recommended that the sample size be between 8 to 15 participants (Peoples, 2021). Eleven pastors were invited to participate in the study. Of the eleven total invitees, there was 63% participation. Two invited pastors did not respond and another two declined because of schedule conflicts, unfamiliarity with the area served, or pastoral assignment was consisted solely of preaching. I was able to meet the goal of saturation for the city block with 64% participation. In a qualitative study, it is important for the researcher to collect data until he or

she reaches information saturation. Information saturation means that the researcher no longer collects new information from co-researchers.

I began reaching saturation by the fifth interview; saturation was met by interview seven. Each participating pastor had experiences of personal trauma, often naming events prior to pastoral ministry. Of the seven pastors, most of the pastors experienced detachment while responding to gun violence and a default emotional setting (described as auto-pilot) that allowed them to suppress their feelings while responding to the wide-range of needs and motions of others. Questions about their experience seemingly triggered similar emotions or appearances of grief and pain for quite a few co-researchers. Hence, I was able to collect body language, facial expressions, gestures, emotional outbursts, and inaudible sounds or sighs as data. Also, most of the pastors made similar observations to where they saw God on their block; the Islamic faith and God within the Muslim community were prevalent responses. There was even unanimous agreement that preaching is a primary function of pastoral positions; however, pastoring requires more given the season or critical needs of the community.

A Phenomenological Study

Phenomenological studies answer this question: “What is it like for an individual to experience a phenomenon” (Peoples, 2021, p. 86)? This type of study goes far beyond an individual’s perception and perspectives. It assists in the meaning making of the experience by helping the individual illustrate his perception and perspectives. The researcher assists the participant in doing so by encouraging him or her to offer detailed examples. For example, I requested more specific details after each co-researcher provided an overall response to questions

related to their experience with gun violence. The following represents questions that helped the co-researchers dig deeper into the exploration of their experience.

1. Can you share more details about what happened?
 - a. What did you see or hear?
 - b. Were any of your other senses activated?
 - i. How did time flow?
 - ii. How did you experience others?
 - iii. How did you experience yourself?
 - c. You mentioned [name a detail or explore a few details]. What did that feel like?
 - d. Did you take away any meaning from the situation?
 - e. Were there any significant objects tied to this event? (Gauld, K. D., 2022b)

I continued to build on the specific events to fully draw out the lived experience rather than a perceived one. For example, “What was it like when [name specific detail share relating to the event]? You mentioned [name subsequent detail]. Can you describe that in more detail” (Gauld, K. D., 2022b)? These questions were designed to encourage the participant to “think about what they were thinking” in an effort for both the researcher and co-researcher to understand something, namely their experience, more clearly. This deep-digging interview strategy is known as intentionality (awareness), which is a fundamental premise of Edmund Husserl’s transcendental, descriptive phenomenology (Peoples, 2021).

Husserl, a founder of the phenomenological theoretical framework, deemed phenomenology to be presuppositional. Ironically, that means that there should not be a theoretical framework. The study should be uninhibited, free of assumptions, and better

positioned to receive the “pure essence of the [way someone looks at something]” (Peoples, 2021, p. 30). Therefore, in applying this approach I will use the process of bracketing.

Bracketing, a form of reduction, requires the researcher to suspend his or her own biases and focus on the studied phenomenon. It is also a means of demonstrating the validity of the data collection and analysis process. The researcher must approach everything with a clean slate for this to be successful. For instance, the purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and perceptions of urban African American pastors amidst the surge of gun violence. Therefore, a researcher would have to suspend his or her own biases and perceptions of being an African American, an urban resident, a minister, and a previous victim (or witness) of gun violence (Ahern, 1999). Hence, the research solicits with genuine curiosity what it is like to be all those things and relies solely on the responses of the co-researchers to provide the answer. I preferred this suspended-judgment approach over Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological method which relies on preconceived knowledge.

Heidegger branched off from Husserl to resolve the issue of bracketing. He believed that there was no way a person could bracket his experiences because people are always in the world with others in the circumstances of existence (Peoples, 2021). Instead, he proposed the “Hermeneutical Circle” which allows researchers to be explicit with their biases or personal understandings of the context being studied. The Husserl applied approach would suspend biases from previous knowledge and evidence. There is much quantitative data accompanied by recommendations and conclusions about African Americans and their experiences with gun violence. There is not an ample collection of research and peer reviewed resources on Black pastoral experiences of gun violence. Qualitative urban and community studies meant to

understand “the why” of such research seemingly miss the voice of Black pastors. Also, perceptions such as Black on Black Crime are already loaded with conclusions and understandings of the problem, creating a desensitization to the research question at hand. Husserl’s approach, which is strengthened by bracketing and intentionally, allows for a process of genuine curiosity and understanding. Further, it will amplify the voices most needed to help explain the phenomenon.

To address my own biases, I had to suspend perceptions from personal upbringings in urban Black churches. This was accomplished by first allowing the literature to create curiosities for the study and dictate the questions used during the semi-structured face to face interviews. The data collected from co-researchers, even if contrary to the literature or researcher’s perceptions, was used to derive themes, situated narratives, and the general description for the study. Further, I remained curious and open to each participant’s perspective, allowing them to define words to help her better understand their reasoning, train of thought, and perspective. Buchanan (2011) thoroughly defined words to guide readers as they reviewed her study. I granted participants the same opportunity to give meaning to words. Such words and definitions are presented as illustrations in Chapter 5 when answering the questions pertaining to the lived experience of pastors.

Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

The validity of this study is based on the co-researcher’s ability to provide truthful and subjective information. To ensure validity, I screened all co-researchers to ensure they had enough experience with gun violence to help explain the phenomenon. I also provided raw data (actual responses from co-researchers) to support the presented results of the study. The use of a

video conferencing service allowed for the interviews to be face-to-face although the interviews took place while both the co-researchers and I were in separate rooms. Further, I was still able to collect non-verbal cues; these cues were also considered when conveying and confirming the explication of data.

I was intentional about creating an interview atmosphere of unrushed time. Also, my willingness to spend extensive time with each participant as they detailed specific experiences helped build trust and encouraged transparency. In turn, I was able to “gain a better perspective of each participant’s context and situation” (Peoples, 2021, p. 69). Transcription and coding of each interview helped me further articulate a deep understanding. Coding is a data analysis strategy for qualitative research that allows the researcher to capture the essence of an experience from collected data (Saldana, 2021). The researcher does this by creating words or phrases that can then be assigned or used to represent parts of the data—a paragraph or group of words, an image, etc. These assignments make it easier for the researcher to detect patterns and themes within the collection of data. Code patterns were shared and explained during explication to further mitigate my bias. Explication replaces the process of data analysis in a research study. Analysis breaks information apart, whereas explication implements a process that allows the researcher to “focus on the whole” and articulate the essence (Peoples, 2021). I demonstrated saturation and my explication process as well as the findings were assessed by my assigned dissertation committee to confirm the findings accurately represented the data and further establish credibility.

I shared the findings with a new set of participants pastoring throughout the city of Philadelphia to test reliability. These pastors were asked to provide feedback and the results were

used to confirm the study's ability to be replicated or reproduced in other areas and produce the same results. The pastor's participation requires a phenomenological agreement in response to this question: "On a scale of 1 (incompletely) to 10 (in all respects), how fully do you resonate with this description of the lived experience of urban Black pastors facing the surge of gun violence?" Subsequent questions were: Does this represent your lived experience? Why or why not? How else would you describe your experience?

I confirmed that each participant understood and signed a consent agreement to reduce ethical concerns. Participants also offered a verbal agreement, confirming an understanding of the risks, procedures, and the voluntary nature of the study. To ensure confidentiality of all participants, I allowed co-researchers to create a pseudonym or assigned participants gender-neutral names made possible through DeDoose. Electronic drafts of transcribed interviews were kept on a Google drive and DeDoose. Printed data was stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. The copies were used to assist with manual coding and never left my home. Participants were informed that both printed and electronic data (including email exchanges) would be deleted after the study was completed.

All co-researchers were consenting adults who appeared mentally and emotionally stable and capable of participating in a trauma-relative study. I made counseling resources available to participants following the study in case the interview evoked inconsolable emotions.

The Researcher's Role

Since 2014, I have been the lead counselor across professional careers. I primarily served patients and clients who are experiencing significant levels of distress or need intensive trauma counseling. My degrees are in Counseling (Master of Science) and English and African

American History (Bachelor of Arts). I also have attended training, obtained certificates, and received coaching to acquire the skills needed to carry out this study's design. No participant has a direct relationship with me. There are no conflicts of interest. To the best of my knowledge, no relationship of any kind between myself and co-researchers should have imparted bias on the research study.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

I entered the study suspending judgements about gun violence. This was to reduce the interference with uncovering the phenomena with integrity. I accomplished this through a process called bracketing and spent time considering prevalent thoughts and ideas from previous experiences, professional experience, and lived experience as it relates to urban gun violence, urban environments, the Black Church, and Black pastors. My parents are retired police officers who served Philadelphia and Chester, PA (a city outside of Philadelphia) leading divisions of major crimes and homicide as well as special weapons and tactics (S.W.A.T.). Therefore, I also had to consider and temporarily suspend judgements generated through second-hand experiences, as well. I practiced bracketing regarding known street codes and colloquialisms. This was a means for helping me fully understand the experiences and the challenges navigating gun violence from their perspective. For instance, the co-researchers were asked to explain any mention of urban or local slang as well as provide illustrations or detailed descriptions of any generally accepted cultural or community trends, typically unspoken and not legally valid. I applied Husserl's approach. Therefore, use of the hermeneutical circle concept is not required.

The study is limited to the participation of one female pastor. Two other women were invited to participate in the study. There were no other women of any clergy status in the area of

interest, because unfortunately, two other Christian churches lead by women pastors had closed and were no longer in operation during the time of the study. Participation was further limited due to the impact of COVID-19. A few churches in the targeted area were not currently operating or back to full function and were inaccessible by email or phone. Other demographic limitations include the absence of participants from Generation X (pastors currently between the ages of 42 and 57). Another limitation was a lack of resources or data on pastoral experiences as it relates to gun violence. Further, the researcher set her own limitations to the study, interviewing only African American church leaders of protestant faith.

The Co-Researchers

The seven pastors selected in a systematic sampling strategy to obtain the lived experience of urban African American pastors for a study particularized to the city of Philadelphia. The sample was drawn from a population of African American pastors serving within the area of interest in the Germantown Section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I selected the Germantown Section because of the escalation of gun violence between 2020 and 2021. The area was likely to satisfy the needed sample size for a study of pastoral experience, given its dynamic between an abundance of churches and extreme instances of violent crime—not just gun violence. Proximity was the primary factor. I selected pastors within an area of interest to capture experience from a shared phenomenon. There was no limitation on age, length of professional service, or ordination status. Invitations went out to the senior pastor. Therefore, all participants had been employed by the church as the senior pastor or the senior pastor selected an associate pastor to participate in the study on behalf of the congregation. Pastors that have experienced gun violence while serving in pastoral ministry were the target population to

participate. Experiences included, but were not limited to, both pastoral and firsthand experiences while serving in their current congregation.

All but one pastor served as the lead pastor. Of the co-researchers, only one was a female. Three of the pastors were millennials, with the youngest participating pastor being born in 1991. There was a forty-year age gap between the oldest and youngest participant. Boomers II and Millennials were represented in the study and there was a 24-year age gap between the Millennials and Boomers II as participants from Generation X were missing from the study. Ministry experience ranged from five to thirty-four years. Participating pastors have been serving their churches between two and twenty-five years. Most pastors confirmed that their congregants lived in the area. Six of the seven pastors live outside of the community where their church is located. Age did not correlate with years of experience. The youngest participating pastor (aged thirty-one at the time of the study) stated that he had been a minister for 20 years, serving several churches. One of the oldest pastors had only been in pastoral ministry for five years and was carrying out his first ministerial assignment. Less than half (only three) had seminary training; the others received specialized or equivalent training. Five pastors had non-ministry related degrees. Five were bi-vocational, meaning they also held jobs outside of their church. Also, this was a second career for all but one pastor. Initial career assignments spanned teaching, law enforcement, communications, insurance brokerage, human resources, and healthcare.

I recruited each participant through email or phone. After reviewing the staffing sections of church websites, an invitation packet that consisted of an introductory letter and a consent form was sent to eleven churches by email and physical mail. These letters were followed up by a phone call and email. Follow-up calls served as the screening process, ensuring that

participants were an appropriate fit for the study. Prior to each interview, I asked each participant to sign the consent form and review the co-researcher version of the interview questions (Data Sources Section or Appendix C). I expected eight participants for the study. Yet, the final number of co-researchers was seven, as determined by saturation.

Declined Invitations

There was a total of five declined invitations of the eleven invitations sent. Two invitations were replaced with an associate or co-pastor due to conflicts in their senior pastors' schedules. Some invited pastors did not have an available or assigned associate to take their place. In other cases, it was mutually determined that the pastor would not participate due to lack of experience regarding gun violence. For instance, a female pastor was recommended for the study. During the interview, she explained that while she is a person of color and often accepted the classification of "Black" by others, she did not identify as that due to her ethnic origins. Another senior pastor who was recommended as a replacement was unable to participate in the study after several attempts to rescheduled missed interview appointments.

Data

This section presents the sources, collection, and analysis of data to answer the research questions.

Data Sources

The instruments used were the interviewer (me) and the interview questions. The following exploratory questions assisted in deriving at the essence of the urban black pastoral ministry:

Intake Questions. The following questions helped establish the population's identity.

About the Pastor. 1) Title and Name, 2) Date of Birth, 3) Gender, 4) Name of the Current Church the pastor is serving, 5) Total Years in Ministry, 6) Total Years serving his or her current church, 7) Do you live in the neighborhood of the current church you serve?, 8) Do most of the congregants live in the area of the current church you serve?, 9) Do you have any seminary training or equivalent, 10) What other specialties and degrees do you have?

Research Questions. The following questions helped explore the phenomenon.

The lived experience of being a Black pastor in Philadelphia. 1) Can you describe for me using three sensory words what it is like for you to pastor in the city of Philadelphia? 2) Tell me about the block where your church is located 3) Can you give me an example of the role you play in the following: a) The prevention of gun violence? b) The midst of gun violence?, c) The aftermath of gun violence? 4) Similar studies reported pastors stated their only role is to present the gospel. What does that mean?

Experiences With Ministry Area Gun Violence. 1) Have you recently been called to respond to gun-related homicide? If not, can you recall a time when you had to respond to a gun-related homicide? 2) Philadelphia is experiencing a surge of gun violence. Can you give me one specific example of what these experiences might be like?

The Pastor's Faith. 1) What is faith like in the middle of all of this? 2) How does your theology inform your response to gun violence? 3) Considering the rise of gun violence in Philadelphia, where is God for you in all of this? 4) Can you share, in light of gun violence, what your ministry journey has been like?

Pastoring All: Both the Victim and the Shooter. 1) Think of a time when you had to support the family of the shooter and describe that experience in as much detail as possible. 2) Is

it different or more difficult than conducting a home visit for a victim? 3) Do you experience these city shootings to be isolated events or something else? 4) Can you share about a time when you suffered with the community due to gun violence?

Intervention and Relief. 1) Considering the pulpit, the polls, rallies, and relationships with police, can you tell of a time when you used a platform recently to speak up about gun violence? 2) Think of a time when you lead a funeral for a shooting victim. Can you describe for me the inside of the sanctuary on the day of the funeral? 3) Can you describe for me using three sensory words what it is like to be an African American pastor serving in the city of Philadelphia during a surge of gun violence?,

Conclusion. 1) Are there any other comments that you would like to offer to this research study? (Gauld, K. D., 2022a)

These questions emerged in response to literature reviews and breaking news articles related to gun violence. The reviews and articles helped determine the most appropriate questions for this qualitative study so that she could turn the individual experiences of each pastor into a collective understanding of their experience as it related to gun violence. Interviews are sufficient for collecting data as they allow the participants to explain their perspective and experiences, generating knowledge and allowing researchers to better understand the phenomenon.

Procedures

I carried out the following steps for this research study. First, the dissertation committee determined the level of risk for participants and worked with me to alleviate and resolve the concerns before approving the study. Once the study was approved, I sent out invitation letters

and consent forms to a targeted group of pastors. They were contacted by email, physical mail, and phone. Some pastors were contacted via Facebook Messenger directly or through the church's Facebook page, if I was unsuccessful in making contact through traditional means.

Invited co-researchers were screened during the follow up calls. Screening consisted of confirmation that the church leader had experience with gun related violence and served within the area of interest. Ministry leaders from eight churches were selected to sit for the interview phase following the screening calls. Only seven kept their scheduled appointments. Interviews were conducted using video conference which allowed for semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The software used was Zoom Video Communications, Inc. The interviews were video and audio-recorded through the software.

During the interview, I received verbal consent for the recorded interview and participation in the study. Except for one participant, each interview took place in a single interview session. The interviews were transcribed by Trint, a London-based audio transcription company. Edits were made to the transcribed documents to ensure the data had been correctly captured.

Collection

The study used interviews as the method for collecting data. The data was collected from seven urban African American pastors serving in the Germantown section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I served as the interviewer with the intent of interviewing participants until saturation was reached and anticipated interviews to last for no more than two hours each. All interviews were conducted and completed within two weeks of the first interview. The data was collected through audio and video recording and immediately transcribed. All videos, audio

recordings, and transcribed data were stored on my university issued Google Drive account. I prepared semi-structured open-ended questions to inquire about the co-researchers' experiences with gun violence. The interviews opened with a series of demographic and biographical background questions. In-depth, exploratory questions followed, and I concluded the interviews by inviting the participant to add anything more to the study.

Explication

In *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, Peoples (2021) outlines steps for explication: 1) Read through the entire transcript and take out unnecessary language; 2) Generate preliminary meaning units; 3) Generate final meaning units for each interview; 4) Synthesize final meaning units into situated narratives under each interview; 5) Synthesize situated narratives into general narratives; and 6) [Create a] general description. I began the process of explication by reviewing the data manually and conducting read-throughs of the interviews. Read-throughs of the interview were done two ways. First, I read each interview completely to summarize the meaning from the co-researcher's whole story. The second read-through was organized by interview question; I read every response related to a specific question in order to summarize a general response for each question. These processes helped the researcher identify preliminary meaning units.

Peoples (2021) defines meaning units as "the allocation piece of data that reveals a feature or trait of the phenomenon being investigated" (p. 60). Manual investigations were followed by use of a coding software, DeDoose, that helped track preliminary meaning units. To deepen my understanding of the phenomenon, I then divided the preliminary units from each participant's story into themes (final meaning units). Next, I organized the parts of each

participant's story together by theme. Organizing the parts is step 4 of Peoples's (2021) outlined process for explication. It required me to organize the meaning of each participant's experience thematically using direct quotes. In the final steps of the process, I created a general narrative from the situated narratives and "united the major phenomenological themes to create a cohesive general description" (Peoples, 2021, p. 143).

Using Software

Four software products were used to assist with the study. Doodle served as a virtual scheduling tool for the semi-structured face-to-face interviews with co-researchers. Zoom Video Communication was used as a data collection tool to which the researcher hosted and recorded interviews. Trint was another data collection tool used for the purpose of transcribing all interviews. I used DeDoose to investigate the data. I helped me combine experiences and determine the essence of the phenomenon. I then solicited feedback on findings using an electronic form software from JotForm, Inc for phenomenological agreement with outside participants.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research method used to answer the research questions and introduced the researcher and co-researchers, procedures, method of analysis, and ethical concerns of the study. Chapter 4 provides the results of the study per the methodology described in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data and the findings of the phenomenological study which uncovers the lived experience of urban African American pastors serving the Germantown Section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This section will describe the participants' perspective and perceptions of gun violence per the two research questions. It will also provide co-researcher demographics, themes found in the research and a general narrative according to themes. Co-researchers were assured anonymity and confidentiality, and therefore, were assigned gender neutral pseudonyms. Any details that may indicate their identity have been removed from the presentation of results.

Co-Researcher Demographics and Setting

The final number of co-researchers was seven, as determined by saturation, who shared their experience as it relates to pastoral ministry and gun violence. A general description of participants was reported in Chapter Three. A demographic characteristics report is being presented in the table below regarding clergy status, age and gender, years of service, education level, and vocational status for the convenience of the reader.

Table 1

Co-Researcher Demographics

GENERAL DESCRIPTION			
Age	4 Boomer IIs	3 Millennials	

Gender	1 Woman	6 Men	
Pastor's Location	6 Live Outside of Community	1 Lives Inside of Community	
Members' Location	3 Majority of Membership from outside of the city	3 Majority of Membership from inside of the city	1 Church with mixed membership
STATUS & SERVICE			
Title	1 Associate Pastor	6 Senior Pastors	
Years Serving Church	4 Less than 6 years	1 Less than 15 years	2 Between 20 and 25 years
Years in Ministry	1 Less than 10 years	1 Less than 20 years	5 Between 20 and 35 years
EDUCATION & EXPERIENCE			
Seminary Training	3 Seminary Trained	4 Equivalent Training	
Non-clergy Degrees; certificates	5 Non-religious Degrees or Certificates	2 Had No Other Training or Degrees	
Bi-vocational	2 Served Only the Congregation	5 Are or Were Bi-Vocational	
Second Time Career	1 Pastoring Was or Is First and Only Career	6 Pastoring Was or Is Second Career	

Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of the Co-Researchers' Demography

All participants identified as African American or Black in terms of race and ethnicity. Six males and one female participated in the study ranging from ages 31 to 71 during the time of the study. Most had at least two decades of ministry experience, while many had only served their current congregation for five years or less. Most did not live in the area; many of their congregants did. This was a second career for all but one participant. Careers spanned Education, Communications, Law and Law Enforcement, Healthcare, Human Resources, and Insurance Brokerage. Most participants had non-clergy related degrees, and many were bi-vocational. More pastors had equivalency training than the ones that had received master's level seminary training.

Interview Location

The study was conducted face-to-face using an online video conferencing system that allowed co-researchers to select the interview setting of their choice. How one remembers something is influenced by how one sees the world in the present day (Peoples, 2021). Hence, location choices and current conditions may have influenced the participants and impacted the results. Five of the seven co-researchers were interviewed in their own home. Some accounts from most of the participants stated that pastors should never let other people see them sweat and that it is not professional to break down. Therefore, the home settings gave pastors the private space to do so. For instance, PASTOR ROYAL and PASTOR HARPER were able to cry and pause to acknowledge the pain and hurt from previous experiences that they may have ignored, avoided, or been too busy to address because they are preoccupied with prioritizing others. This may not have been possible outside of the comfort, privacy, and safety of their own homes.

Participants PASTOR HARPER and PASTOR JODY interviewed in Germantown where the sounds of emergency vehicle sirens could be heard in the background. One participant was in his office and the other was home, allowing the proximity of the sounds of each siren to become a part of their personal and professional reflections. Events happening outside of their window often tied into their current train of thought.

Two co-researchers had the day off, meaning they were not expected to provide a service to the church that day. PASTOR HARPER was able to offer unrushed time and share in greater detail and quantity of accounts since they were home and off. The pastor's interview exceeded the average interview time by one hour. PASTOR SIDNEY was home, describing their pastoral day off as a day for parenting and waiting on-call for their government job which focuses on gun violence prevention and interruption. The demands of single parenting and current job created interview interruptions and the need for a two-part interview session. PASTOR DANA and PASTOR TAYLOR interviewed in between work assignments. PASTOR DANA was away for a funeral during the late evening interview that occurred in a hotel, which had made for a long two-days. They had planned early morning drive to participate in their own congregation's activities, whereas PASTOR TAYLOR's interview started via Zoom on his phone during a drive from their office to their home. Also, the pastor was temporarily pulled from the interview to handle a congregational matter. These interviews greatly impacted an already overwhelming schedule although the co-researchers contributed deep reflections and accounts to the study.

Another important setting was time. These interviews took place shortly after the onset of the war in Ukraine. Also, the pastors were coming out of a liturgical season known as Easter. The following events were highlighted in the accounts shared by some co-researchers given the

time of year: experiences that commemorated the last days of Jesus (Holy Week), Good Friday, and the Death of Jesus and His resurrection, participation in Seven Last Word Services on Good Friday, and the anticipation of Pentecost, which celebrates the birth of Christ's church and the gift of the Holy Spirit to speak up courageously.

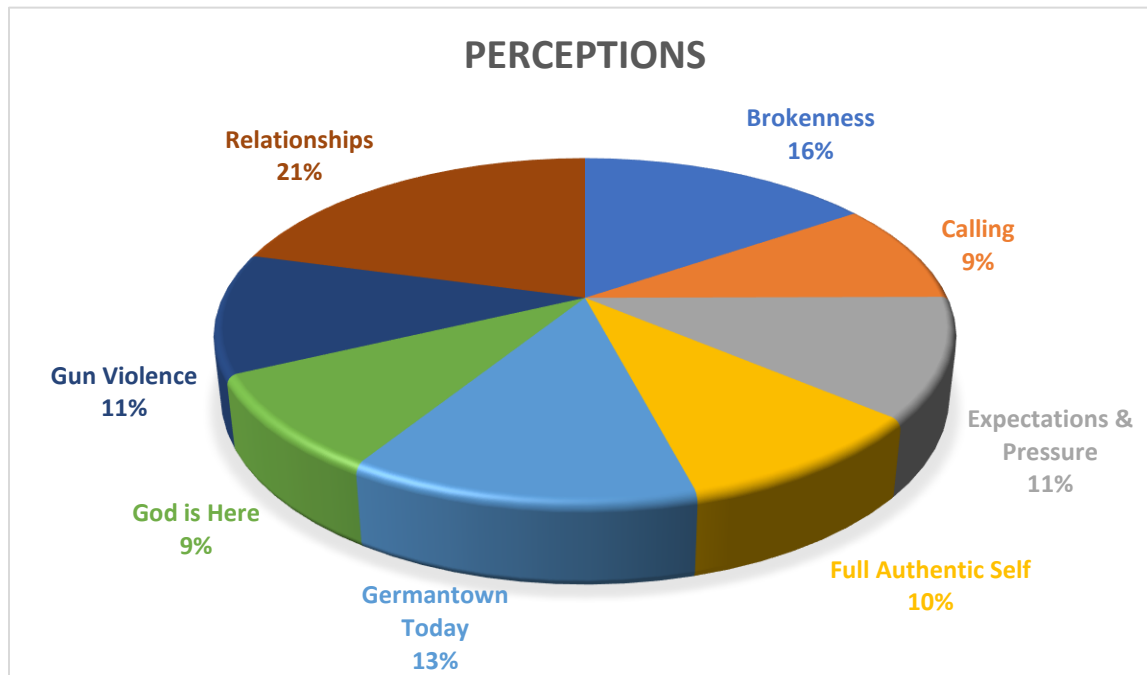
Findings: Emergent Themes

Each participant remained focused on providing examples relevant to their experiences of gun violence with guidance from the interview questions. All presented themes align with the following research questions: 1) What is the lived experience of an urban African American pastor serving Philadelphia during the surge of gun violence? and 2) How are Black Pastors Facing the Surge of Gun Violence in Philadelphia? My line by line and paragraph analysis helped identify significant information that was not initially heard or captured during the face-to-face interviews.

A review of approximately 16 hours of interviews resulted in data being indexed with codes 3,871 times; a total of sixty codes were used. The codes helped identify significant patterns and themes. Eight were identified as overarching themes and 52 themes were categorized as sub-themes (reduced to subcodes). Subcodes were determined by the researcher after reviewing the interviews of each participant as a whole and then reviewing responses to questions as one whole response to explicate the main idea. I only analyzed data that was significant to the research questions.

Table 2

Emergent Themes



Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of Emergent Themes

Emergent themes were Brokenness, Calling, Expectation, Full Authentic Selves, Germantown Today, God is Here, Gun Violence, and Relationships. These themes were based on the codes that were tied to a specific perception related to the research question. The co-researchers emphasized the significance of their personal experience as church leaders responding to gun violence. Themes ranged from vivid descriptions of experiences to deep emotions tied to personal and on-going events.

Themes are the patterns found in study participants' reports, characterizing their perceptions and experiences. An example of a theme, per Peoples (2021), is all participants in a study reporting conflict in their childhood. The conflict will be a pattern that makes way for a theme to emerge. Further, any shared experience can be deemed a theme by the researcher if it is

significant and relevant to the research question. Therefore, I used coding (process of giving a name to each pattern) to categorize and organize each emerging theme. The leading theme was Relationships based on accounts that ranged from pastoral status and church property to community presence and sense of proximity to the gun violence issue. The themes Germantown Today and Brokenness were among the top themes with the co-researchers similarly reporting emotional and spiritual understandings of the current state of Germantown being tied to their overall pastoral experiences.

Research Question 1, Lived Experiences During the Surge of Gun Violence

This section will address the research question: What is the lived experience of an urban African American pastor serving Philadelphia during the surge of gun violence? The interview questions that were designed to prompt dialogue regarding the lived experiences with gun violence. The goal was to highlight the meaning of each participant's experience thematically. I did so by reiterating participant stories under specific interview questions, which is Step 4: Situated Narratives of the general data analysis steps (Peoples, 2021). The relevant themes were Brokenness, Calling, Expectations, and Full Authentic Selves. I then created a descriptive narrative (Step 5) to respond to the research question.

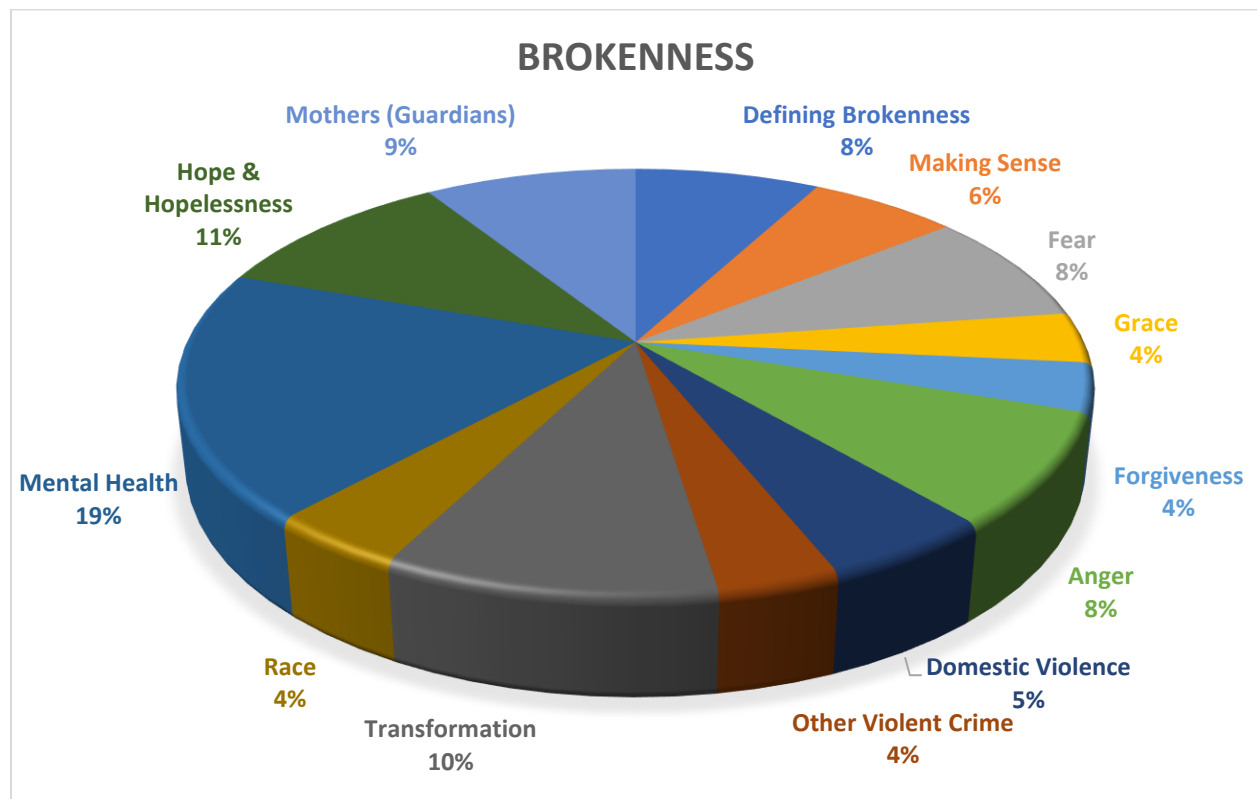
Brokenness

In the first theme, Brokenness, co-researchers expressed that gun violence creates an immeasurable and weighty task for a pastor to hold all the pieces of a hurting community, whether it be every single emotion felt by the victim's family and community members impacted or the burden of navigating the conditions leading up to gun related incidents and the reactions

and responses that follow. Several sub themes emerged relating to the pastors' experience with brokenness as it relates to individuals including Black pastors, processes, and communities affected by gun-violences. These included Mental Health, Defining Brokenness and Making Sense, and Hope and Hopelessness and Transformation. Participants were asked to describe what it is like to pastor in the city of Philadelphia and the roles they play, particularly as a respondent to gun violence from either prevention to aftermath.

Table 3

Understanding the Pastoral Experience of Brokenness



Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of Brokenness Themes

The pie chart shows the sub themes that tie into Brokenness. Most accounts lifted mental health—representing the largest slice of the pie at 19%—as an urgent or mitigating issue in urban communities to which a Black pastor must navigate. Hopelessness (11%) and Transformation (10%) were prevalent topics, encompassing both personal and perceived public outlooks due to the surge of gun violence and man’s ability to overcome brokenness. Defining Brokenness (8%) and Making Sense (6%) are distinct slices of the pie. Yet, the two themes are lined by the notion that “gun violence is senseless” and the perception that brokenness is humanly inconceivable. Therefore, together the two sub themes round out the top three as a 14% slice. The Mothers (Guardian), Fear, and Anger each represent 9% slice. Domestic Violence (5%) together with Other Violent Crime (4%) also fills 9% of the pie. Lastly, themes relevant to race, grace, and forgiveness appeared at 4% each. In short, brokenness, poor mental health, and senseless trauma are serious issues pastors must navigate. Yet, there’s equal emphasis on a positive pastoral outlook. The chart demonstrates, in comparison to the other slices of the pie, that there are lofty expectations for hope for transformation and a better future even in the face of hopelessness. Further, per co-researchers accounts and the quantitative percentages reflected in the pie chart, there are undertones of race, grace, and forgiveness within brokenness.

Mental Health. All participants reported the propensity of gun violence to deteriorate the mental health of a community.

The aftermath of trauma is young people seeing blood on the corner and sidewalk as they are walking home. Or as they are getting off the bus, seeing a body stretched out on the ground or the yellow tape that reads “Do Not Enter”. It does something psychological to the community. And it goes untreated. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

PASTOR ROYAL experienced an emptiness, having listened to mothers that are not able to move on after the loss of a child. This was demonstrated by the mother's ability to share at a vigil as if [the murder] happened yesterday when more than 15 years have passed. Participants also bear witness to the long-term effects of unresolved trauma. Community members can slip into trauma (PASTOR DANA). PASTOR CASSIDY said the gun violence takes a toll on the ministry, specifically with regards to their ministry with the people who "don't want to leave their house" due to high safety concerns. Co-researchers experienced as a witness or a mediator for the negative reactions to unresolved adverse childhood experiences that manifested in the behaviors of adults who experienced gun-related trauma as children and youth. PASTOR DANA shared a report on a woman who witnessed the aftermath of her brother murdering someone when she was only a child. He states that the young woman makes bad choices when it comes to men. PASTOR DANA has witnessed the woman in fights with domestic partners and attributes it to her "mirroring men who live the same lifestyle of her brother".

Gun violence was described as complex, meaning the pastor had experience addressing a death that connected to more deaths and other health issues. Participants acknowledged that death was interconnected to previous incidents and through underlying causes. However, as it relates to mental health, many of their experiences with the idea of "more deaths" were suicide and subsequent (retaliatory) deaths. PASTOR TAYLOR described gun violence as game changing, impacting a person years later. "The person who is impacted will never be the same mentally and emotionally" (PASTOR TAYLOR). PASTOR DANA agrees stating that families are never the same after a loss. PASTOR ROYAL explained that unaddressed trauma or failure to find justice and closure impacts the physical health of a victim's mother. Her overwhelm

attributed to her mental, emotional, and physical state made the victim's mother confess that she wanted to commit suicide. Subsequently, most co-researchers owned the responsibility of fostering resilience. PASTOR CASSIDY says, "[The pastor] uses faith as a means to not shut us (meaning, the community sharing in the pain) down. He also shared that he has to figure out how to turn faith into "how to survive" and "how to live without fear" so that one can survive emotionally.

Some co-researchers described the intersection of mental health issues and gun violence. The intersection was not reserved solely to the person with the mental health issue and those involved in the shooting. Participants have experienced the mental health impact on a wider group of people, relatives, those involved, survivors, emergency workers and investigators, and even the responding pastor. "People have mental health issues, and we just walk up and down the street and pass them without regard until something happens." (PASTOR ROYAL) Knowing Walter Wallace, a 27-year-old Black male who was shot by two police officers in the Cobbs Creek Section of Philadelphia November 2020, PASTOR DANA explained, "Walter Wallace really had mental health issues." PASTOR ROYAL shared a similar story of another widely publicized police-involved shooting death of a young Black man, her former student, who was killed in front of the White House. "He wasn't on his medicine," she says, "It broke my heart when it happened because he just needed help."

There was some consensus around the idea that pastors should "never let them see you sweat" or to focus on the wellbeing of the people in the moment rather than yourself. However, responses equally represented co-researchers' accounts of their own mental health struggles as well as their perceptions of the impact of mental health and its role in urban gun violence.

PASTOR DANA described himself as heartbroken and very emotional, witnessing a fellow ministry leader “still coming to church traumatized and in need of a therapist” after being shot in the leg on his way home.

The biggest toll is thinking what I have to offer is just a drop in the bucket- meaningless words in making a difference. (PASTOR JODY)

PASTOR JODY further explained the feeling of exhaustion, overwhelm, and depression and how its stress impacted his gut-health and overall physical health. PASTOR JODY also experienced imposter syndrome and insomnia. After explaining the difference between a senior pastor and an associate pastor, PASTOR ROYAL shared that the enormity of what it means to be the person that everyone looks at as pastor is daunting. “There's a sense of emptiness, like “How in the world am I going to do this?” It is difficult to be all of these things and feel as though I accomplished that pastoral role,” PASTOR ROYAL says, “[The congregation] doesn’t even have a clue, but you have to fake it until you make it.”

Based on professional or collaborative experiences, most of the co-researchers acknowledge that teachers, police, and similar community leaders may have similar experiences which points to a need from them to “receive better training as well as mental health” (PASTOR DANA) as it relates to gun violence. PASTOR JODY shared that there is a need for foundation support, as in funding, to support the avoidance and alleviation of clergy burnout. He says, “A training helped me, and other clergy realize that pastors can’t do everything: No sermon brings the complete gospel. No prayer brings complete peace. No program accomplishes all of the church's goals.” The training also provided a review of the comprehensive list of job descriptions

for a pastor and explained what it does not do. PASTOR JODY said the overall message was that “[clergy are not Messiahs; we are ministers.” Understanding that, he explains, frees us up.

Brokenness and Making Sense. The co-researchers provided several illustrations of brokenness, ranging from broken homes to “beefing” families and to not knowing fathers to be introduced to “the life” (of drug, gang, or violent activity) by a father, brother, or trusted family member. It was illustrated through the war-like conditions of Philadelphia to the present-day war in Ukraine. There were also reports of brokenness in the millennial as well as in the generations that raised them.

If you're a grandma and your grandkid is bringing money for your table to help with food, but you don't ask them where the money's coming from, Grandma, you are part of it, too. (PASTOR JODY)

And you can ask any ten men, and I've done that, “How many of you, men, have had your fathers in your life?” I'd say six of them would say, “no”. [One of the six would retract his answer and say,] “As a matter of fact, yeah, I know my dad. He used to sell me.” What kind of father is that? (PASTOR HARPER)

Further, participants' most significant experiences of life shattering moments involved two or more children playing. At some point, the children find a gun, often unlocked in a home, or they resort to using one as emotions run high or someone sorely loses a game.

Participants shared in the experience of brokenness as it relates to the failed systems or the sinfulness of situations, namely poor support of veterans that are struggling emotionally, financially, and in other areas of stability, great legislative needs to deal with “all these guns that

are out there” (PASTOR JODY) and the craziness of someone being about to afford a gun but not appropriate medication or sufficient healthcare. The brokenness, often described by many of the participants as the plight of Black People in urban communities, is something that becomes a part of the community experience even if it is not an individual’s experience. PASTOR CASSIDY says, “Then it becomes trauma.” Many of the co-researchers share the understanding that, though a pastor cannot make sense, they must create opportunities for people to experience relief as well as be assured that the church wants to share in the anger and questioning related to our deep pain and brokenness. There can be solidarity amid our brokenness, even if it is a simple “sign in front of the church that says, “We are praying for peace everywhere.” (PASTOR JODY)

Some co-researchers wrestled with the reaching brokenness although they recognize that connecting with people that are hurting can bring together a broken community. PASTOR CASSIDY further defines brokenness as a deep pain, questioning, “So, how can faith go deep where the pain is?” He reasons that faith needs to encounter the death people are dealing with and as they are pondering death. PASTOR SIDNEY recalled preaching at a funeral for a deceased child that brought in a significant turnout of eight hundred mourners. “What do you say,” he asks, “to a dad, a classmate? How do you explain that God is still good and such? How do you make sense out of nonsense?” PASTOR ROYAL says, ““When people want to say, ‘God is gone’ and ‘why did God do it?’ I can’t have an answer for it.” Similarly, to all of the co-researchers, she reports that clarity and making sense of gun violence is inappropriate. It is cringeworthy, she says. Not only can it “paint a picture that diminishes the way people feel” but it is beyond the scope of pastoral authority. “I have to remind them,” PASTOR ROYAL says, “that the Bible says that God is near the brokenhearted and he binds up the wounds.”

All the co-researchers experienced gun violence as senseless, one (PASTOR HARPER) noting that it is appropriate to be outraged and angry because these are “wiles of the devil.” They also noted that making sense was a means for people to find peace, become content with the situation, and even decide “do what they needed to do” regarding retribution. Some co-researchers shared that attempting to make sense is not beneficial, often desensitizing us emotionally and spiritually.

If you are certain about something, then you do not need faith. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

Stereotypes, justify, and validating is another way of making sense. (PASTOR ROYAL)

PASTOR SIDNEY described an experience with law enforcement where they were disconnected and cold in the moment of trauma, even when people were exhibiting a range of emotions. “They see this as Black on Black Crime- Black folks killing each other again. And so, they are just coming there to process the scene. The co-researchers' general understanding of brokenness to be a spiritual issue granted them the humility to allow God and the gospel to help people make sense.

The Gospel brings hope, patience, and perseverance for things that are nonsensical.

(PASTOR CASSIDY)

Staying in your lane means never using an opportunity, such as a funeral, viewing, wake, etc., to try to make sense out of something that is senseless. The gospel points out that we never have the answers; people expect us to have the answers if we come there everything will be better. Yet, good news is not that; it is pointing everything and directing everything to Christ. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

Faith is never in the thing that you can see and make sense of. It is in the things that you cannot see. (PASTOR DANA)

Although the pressure existed, the co-researchers felt free from the responsibility of making sense, having answers, and demeaning people to alter or transform them. Instead, they could put more effort into prioritizing the needs of the people and coming to a traumatic situation as a listener.

Hope, Hopelessness, and Transformation. Most of the co-researchers experienced the overwhelm of Germantown being in a seemingly insurmountable state of hopelessness.

[As a pastor and “a government official”], I see the bodies, the blood, the tears, and the hopelessness in the eyes of mothers and fathers. I see our community, in some respects, how to cope, they become desensitized. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

The area was depressed and empty after the shooting. And this part of Germantown is never empty like this, so [the community] was in a state of shock. (PASTOR DANA)

I listen to the commissioner [making a report on the news]. There have been times when I'm like, “Well, you sound hopeless. You sound like you gave up and that's your job.” If [the Commission] has given up, what can we do? (PASTOR ROYAL)

Although pastors see the destruction, depression, and devastation, most shared that they see it with a spiritual eye and that brings hopes to, one day, see something different. Seeing the hurt, PASTOR HARPER explains, “propels me to make a difference.”

Many co-researchers have experienced gun-related miracles or hold a theological perspective that God can miraculously transform the community, especially with regards to gun violence. PASTOR DANA shared an account of a couple that attended their church service and caused an interruption. He described the woman as demon-possessed, and having a deep conviction that people should never leave the church the same way he came, he stopped the service and tended to her needs. “We prayed with her, and we did not give up.” PASTOR HARPER says, “because you are not going to leave the same way you came.” He reported that when the woman left, she was fine and had a smile on her face. PASTOR HARPER recalled an incident that, as a medical professional, appeared to be a hopeless situation that would not end well. He reported that the victim had been shot in the face while trying to intervene in a dispute. The angry family—fifty of its members—that had gathered in the hospital and a considerable number were already in a retaliatory response mode. So, PASTOR HARPER interrupted the retribution planning with a call to pray, and he prayed for the ailing victim.

“You have to believe in miracles,” PASTOR HARPER says. He stresses that one must believe despite what is heard or seen, despite what the doctors say, despite the blood loss, even though the victim is unresponsive at this point. He explained the pastor’s role is to be used by God to remind people of life-saving miracles, even when the family has already counted the victim as dead and is preparing to take a life for a life. PASTOR HARPER proudly reported that after an hour of his prayer with the family, the doctors came to the family to inform them that all of the victim’s vital signs were stable. He would not be paralyzed. He did not have a brain injury and there were no future concerns for a comatose state or stroke. Although there were some particles from the bullet, which traveled and lodged in his brain, it was not life threatening. “To

this day,” PASTOR HARPER says, “[the victim] up. He is walking. He is talking. He is normal and living a life that is not in the tomb. So that, in itself, was an amazing response.”

PASTOR HARPER further explains that miracles are possible when you accept and acknowledge the hurt and help people replace the associated anger and retaliation with faith, allowing it to create hope. Similarly, PASTOR CASSIDY says, “Love, an active love, counters hopelessness, despair, and senses of loss.” He also shared a belief that people can become miracle-making instruments. He explains the pastor has a role in shifting the conversation to faith and to dependence on God for deliverance, even when people ask, “Should we be asking and praying to God to just make everything better and change everything?” “I’ve emphasized,” he says, “praying to God makes us more effective instruments of [God’s] peace as a strength. Prayer is not for God to work miracles directly from heaven in that situation, but [that He] would change us so that we can change the situation. God gives us the answers so that we can then go out and implement everything.”

Some co-researchers have experienced hope as an ability to hold on to one’s faith.

[Pastors] connect the dots between hopelessness and despair and witness to God who has brought us through these seemingly hopeless things in the past. [reminding them] that he has promised to go ahead of us, to call us into a season of hope and change in the future. (PASTOR JODY)

Obviously, in the midst of death, you do speak of the eternal hope of life beyond life and, also, hope for each passing day of this life that there's a reason to live. There's a reason to remember. And there's a reason to love and to seek peace. Even when it's so difficult

and seemingly impossible to achieve that, we have to keep trying and find different ways of trying. Preaching in the midst of death, is a theology of hope; it's a gospel of hope, perseverance, and patience. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

God has a preferential option for the poor [as observed from the Latino violence in El Salvador]. Even though the cartels kept killing them, they held onto the idea that God cares about us. They held onto their faith by remembering. We (the people in Philadelphia) have to remember that God cares for us even when people do not live like when Jesus says, "Whatever you do to the least of me, you have done until me." (PASTOR ROYAL)

There were different times, even in the Old Testament, where there were wars. There were battles. There were weapons used. But in the middle of all, if they had God on their side, they would prevail. Even with Moses, whenever his arms were lifted up, that's when they prevailed. So, I believe that even in the midst of violence, if we keep God first, we shall prevail. Some things may be lost, but the battle overall will be won on our side. We will be victorious. (PASTOR DANA)

Most of the co-researchers have experienced funerals as a created opportunity for a pastor to be a change agent in the lives of the people within the communities that they live and serve. Yet, all the co-researchers shared experiences where they participated in transformative community activities. PASTOR SIDNEY used his ability to create jobs through his government role as a means for providing second chances to adults who were former juvenile lifers. He explained the Juvenile Lifers are children who are given life sentences without the possibility of

parole. He recalled two adults who had served “nearly 30 years for first degree murder charges they received at the ages of 16 and 17.” PASTOR SIDNEY shared the benefit of repurposing former juvenile lifers for intervention work with present day teens. PASTOR JODY shared an account of how working with other community members to form a group that was “intent on stopping straw purchases.” There was equal emphasis, from co-researchers, on changing the culture and conditions of the community.

We have to be change agents against the microaggressions associated with a community that does not see the value of our young people and sees them as expendable commodities. (PASTOR ROYAL)

Gun violence is a symptom of everybody not doing their part to create conditions of abundant living for themselves and their neighbors. We should be using our gifts as educators to help educate children, etc. I hope [pastors] are challenging folks to engage with the community, and are creating opportunities, outlets, and safe corridors so that children do not join gangs. (PASTOR JODY)

We don't need a Christian president just because they are Christian; we need a Christian president that understands the assignment, the job, the role. We need Christian judges just to be Christian. We need judges that understand how to legislate, how to really occupy, and everything in between. I'm really praying for, in our police enforcement, in our schools, both on the college level and then on the elementary levels, Christians that ain't just there to be Christians. But for those that are really called to be there. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

There's Christian preachers, police officers, politicians, and even Muslim leaders that are doing great work in our school system, with police reform, and community relationships in our neighborhoods. They understand the long-term investment needed.

(PASTOR SIDNEY)

Calling

The second theme is Calling. Co-researchers shared the conviction that a prophetic voice is needed as it relates to the gun violence crisis in urban communities. A few sub themes emerged relating to the pastor's role as a prophetic intercessor. These included Speaking Up, Understanding Calling and Ministry to Offenders. Participants were asked to detail some interesting ministry experiences and times they used a platform to speak up about gun violence. Questions also inquired about time spent supporting the family of the shooter and if there was a felt difference between how a pastor serves the victim's family and the shooter's family.

Table 4

Understanding the Pastoral Experience as it Relates to Call



Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of Calling Themes

The pie chart shows the sub themes that tie into Calling. Speaking up (38%) represents the largest slice of the pie, mostly referencing the need for a pastor's prophetic voice during gun violence. Understanding one's personal call to pastoral ministry (34%) proved to be a top theme as most accounts emphasized pastoral mandates and a minister's ability to operate effectively within his or her anointing. Ministry to Offenders (17%) is a significant part of call as it relates to clergy call. However, how a pastor responds to gun violence is equally important, taking up 12% of the pie. Pastors are called to speak up and do something amid gun violence which

includes a balance of both effective responses and effective ministry to offenders. Hence, an understanding of the pastor's call is critical.

Speaking Up. A few co-researchers experienced the privilege of having their voice in spaces “that God allows [them] to be.” (PASTOR SIDNEY) “I walk into a room, not expecting to wear the pastor hat; but there is a prophetic solution that is needed,” PASTOR SIDNEY says, “This particular moment needs a pastor's voice.” PASTOR TAYLOR described it as being the one that asks the tough questions. “I am the voice of reason and the voice of prayer,” he says. PASTOR ROYAL describes the privilege as a personal and spiritual obligation to be like Christ. In part, that means being “where people are, and empowering the church to be a liberation church that engages people that are homeless, struggling, and [the young people] who think that living this life [of violence] is the only way for them to protect themselves.” (PASTOR ROYAL) “Gun violence needs to be spoken about and included within our overall communication and consideration of how our faith and how we live out our faith,” PASTOR CASSIDY says, “You never know when you are preaching to someone. You are hoping to touch on and define some points in their lives. [Pastors] are trying to speak to their fear in terms of faith and courage.”

A few co-researchers, also, recognized speaking up to be a part of Germantown's rich history. PASTOR JODY explained that Germantown has a rich history of both the anti-slavery movement and revolutionary war protest. “The first official anti-slavery protest happened here,” he says, “So [Germantown is] strong on social justice through our institutions and residents.” On the other hand, “the area is historically known for gun violence or the groups that perpetuate the gun violence.” (PASTOR SIDNEY) Yet pastors shared accounts of trying to remediate that historical ill, by speaking up, creating safe spaces for community members, and inviting other

groups, such as mom groups, safe haven facilitators, and former juveniles, to interrupt gun violence. PASTOR JODY shared that he addressed brokenness in worship and to discuss it “along with what’s happening in our city” can change historical and on-going trends in the community.

Most co-researchers shared an understanding that it is important to unite voices and efforts, recognizing that the mantle of pastors is a powerful platform and creates opportunities for others to share.

I am not a political preacher. The way I talk about things is through encouragement and affirmation within [our congregation’s] means and ministry- social settings, mentorship or discipleship- in an effort to prevent a lot of this stuff. Still, that doesn't mean that as a pastor, I can't raise up somebody that's legitimately called to hold office, to pursue office, and that would be the extension of how we deal with that. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

I don't usually get on social media too much, but depending on what it is, if I feel it can be something that's enlightening and empowering, I'll either share it myself or [share something from] somebody [that] has a good post. [Rev.] Traci D. Blackmon has a lot of great things, so I try to share some of her things. (PASTOR ROYAL)

Many of the co-researchers have through experiences of speaking up witnessed people (who are easily affected) come closer to the issue of gun violence in a way that is informational and not aggressive. It has also been experienced by participants as a way to bring the minister closer to the people, especially when situations such as George Floyd and Michael Brown affect the black community powerfully.

Speaking up shows that I consider [the gun violence issue] to be important and that it needs to be important to all of us. So, I recognize that it's on our minds because it's so prevalent now. It's such a critical stage- not a sometime thing but happens daily. I'm pretty sure we're all thinking about it and that we're all concerned about it. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

I have pastor friends that were not acknowledging it. [One pastor,] his church is where the violence is going on. The Walter Wallace situation, too. And how can you not talk about what everyone else is talking about? (PASTOR ROYAL)

We will be pushed out if we are not addressing community concerns. Churches in other cities have become condos and nightclubs. If we allow ourselves to become irrelevant, we will look up in 15 years and not have a voice. Poverty and gun violence are our issues. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

PASTOR CASSIDY shared that he speaks up through publications. He said, “I am able to write about violence and the effort to find solutions to violence, especially in the context of a church event because churches don’t always seem to be involved. So [the article I did on two pastors] felt important; it was in a promotional way, and it helped other churches that did not know what to do, either be attracted to participate or to inquire about how they can participate in this as well.” Four other co-researchers shared that the media was a terrific way to inspire church involvement in the gun violence issue. If their own congregation did not have related programming, they could encourage participation with groups or congregations that did. Another participant (PASTOR TAYLOR) valued being able to learn from others rather than go through it

for himself. “If I see you deal with something and I and I really like how you handled it, I’m definitely going to model it,” he says.

Some co-researchers experienced speaking up as a means for providing efforts, not answers. It can be demonstrated in one’s intentionality when it comes to lifting news of various efforts to address gun violence from the pulpit. It can also be in the form of speaking about sexual violence, suicide, and domestic violence. Speaking up enables a pastor to demonstrate the importance of “not being silent.” (PASTOR ROYAL) PASTOR ROYAL explains, “[People, even pastors] change the subject when we are not comfortable.” While some people change the subject when family members of the victim start talking about their lost loved one, she says, she enjoys seeing [the family] talk. PASTOR ROYAL considers it an honor that they invite her to talk about someone special to them. This includes being able to laugh and sing songs and poems that the victim wrote, eulogizing the victim, and just having fellowship before and afterward the funeral.

Most of the co-researchers did not reserve speaking out against gun violence solely to confront the shooter. They have experienced it as a way to call the church into action or to agitate for the sake of pressuring a change in the congregation’s attitude and involvement regarding gun violence.

The good news is, through the lens of Good Friday, that each and every person being able to speak the truth of what they have done or not done contributes to the conditions of brokenness and suffering that has allowed innocent people to be killed. Once we realize our role, we have this “Father. Forgive them, for they know not what they did” moment

to receive that grace in a way that heals us and allows us to be a vessel of blessing and healing to others. (PASTOR JODY)

I am called to speak truth to power, and I remember that no matter what room I am standing in. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

To the congregation: *No, we still come here. We still gather, we still try to find ways to address the problems that have become more urgent in the community as well. (PASTOR CASSIDY)*

[A former member of our youth ministry] was selling drugs and got shot. He got back into the same stuff after that and got shot again. Now he's paralyzed. He'll be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life, and his cousin wants to get retaliation and go after the person that did it. I told his cousin, "You will not make the situation better by doing this; it will create a war and you could be dead." Although he was mad and angry, I was able to talk some sense to him. (PASTOR DANA)

Still, most of the co-researchers agreed that there were things that a pastor cannot say. It is important not to cosign. PASTOR ROYAL recalled the tactfulness and care required to ensure words and actions that seemingly do so. Further, participants shared the sentiments that you cannot use a large platform such as a vigil or a funeral to threaten or demean people with death or hell if they do not come out of "that life". Rather, more appropriate responses would be words that encouraged and inspired change and demonstrated love for every person present and listening.

Understanding Call. As it relates to gun violence, many co-researchers shared that they felt pastors were called by this occasion.

The church's mission and voice are needed more now than ever before. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

People outside the church occupy different areas and institutions to create and affect change. We should not feel like we can only affect change through the pulpit. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

I present more than just a news report; it can be about how faith helps them move on or forward. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

It's a sacrifice. It's an inconvenience. However, you got to look at the bigger picture. The people are hurting, and we are called to be a conduit of healing. (PASTOR HARPER)

Some of the co-researchers shared that the call is personal and cannot be taken away. PASTOR JODY described his call as life-giving and affirming. He feels that he is using the gifts God has given him and intended to use them, specifically to pursue his call, until he was defrocked for being a gay clergyperson. However, that never happened. PASTOR ROYAL asserts that her lived experience is plainly important as the lived experience of the people around her. Her call is a culmination of her experiences and what she learned in seminary. Thus, PASTOR ROYAL says that incorporating that and whatever else God has given her helps her bring hope and light in a world that is lost.

PASTOR HARPER says that despite people looking at your past and people judging you for that, you still must press forward in your call. Further, PASTOR TAYLOR explained that

there is no need to feel pressure regarding your call, specifically when it comes to the demands of people. The call to prophecy comes with a skill limitation. “We know that we only know in part and can only prophesy in part,” PASTOR HARPER says. This should take away the pressure of responding to people’s demand for answers or to make sense out of senselessness, if the pastor accepts that that is beyond his capability. Instead, PASTOR HARPER reiterates, “[Pastors] have to be the voice of reason and counsel.”

Ministry to Offenders. Most co-researchers stated that there was no conflict in providing support to offenders; they did not experience conflictual feelings and came with a readiness and willingness to help rather than to judge. Experiences have ranged from providing support to the family when the victim was the perpetrator to demanding compassion from people who could bring justice and just resolutions to the immediate circumstance or overall issue of gun violence. PASTOR DANA shared the details of his experience after arriving at the scene of a drive-by shooting that occurred outside of his church. “I was walking around like this is unbelievable,” he said, “An officer said, ‘When will this neighborhood learn?’ and I responded, ‘This is the absence of love, and this is what this neighborhood needs.’” PASTOR TAYLOR believes that one’s theology should shape his or her approach to gun violence. Hence, he holds a strong conviction that even a murderer deserves forgiveness, prayers, etc. for “gun violence is a demonic expression of a soul that needs saving.”

Some of the ministers wrestled with actively engaging in ministry with offenders in a way that was Biblically appropriate as to uphold their convictions without diminishing the dignity of others.

How do I carry out the aim of the cross and bring justice without judgment and recompense? Everyone deserves justice. The challenge is how do you look in the face of someone that legitimately did something wrong on their level and still encourage them at the same time? Still hold them accountable for what they do? We are preaching not just from the letter of the text but the heart and intent of the text. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

PASTOR JODY explains that members of his congregation who have been imprisoned for murders or with gun-related charges are still cared for by the church with letters, periodic gifts, mentions on the prayer list, and pastoral care to their families. PASTOR DANA shared a commitment to help a member of a former congregation who committed a murder twenty years ago. The person will be released from prison in five years and return to a different world in comparison to when he went into prison. “So now he has to try to figure out how to survive in this world after you've been in jail for over 20 years,” says PASTOR DANA.

Most co-researchers reported that experiences with the shooter's family is a common part of ministry. “There's a whole sense of retribution,” PASTOR ROYAL says, which can be felt even if there is a trial, justice is served, and the shooter is in jail. PASTOR ROYAL explains that the family is still accessible, and the victim's family or friends may want to go after them if they cannot get to the shooter. Agreeing, PASTOR DANA says, “The family of the shooter is in fear of retaliation” He has heard the concerns of the family: “Where do we live? Can we get protective custody? We need to move.” PASTOR TAYLOR and PASTOR JODY have dealt with families experiencing shame after a neglectful or senseless situation leads to murder. “Instead of sadness and depression, depending on the situation, if it's the first time or second time,” PASTOR JODY explains, “there's this idea that this is not the child that I had hoped to

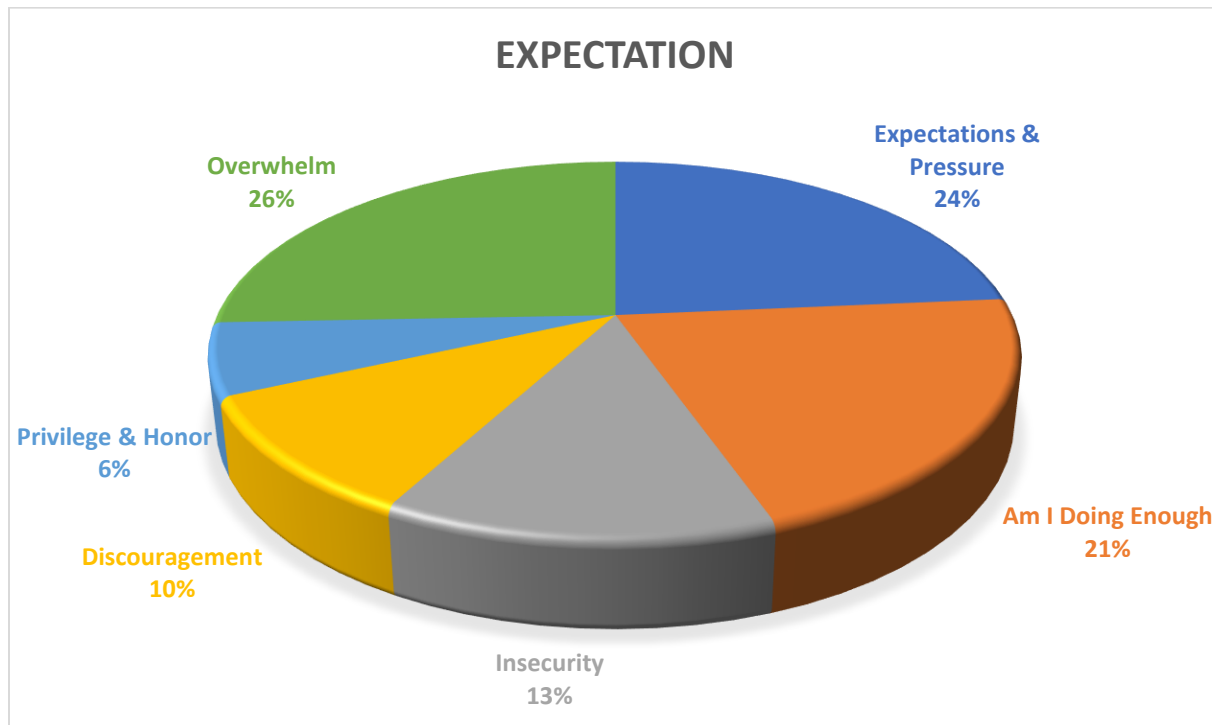
have.” There is a sense that the shooter’s dreams and future are gone. PASTOR JODY believes that for a parent, grief and more so shame is connected with that. PASTOR TAYLOR would add that escapism and avoidance also play a role when a family grieves the crime of a loved one.

Expectation

Theme three, Expectation, is where participants shared the “enormity of being a Black pastor” serving a community with a variety of urgent needs. Several sub-themes emerged relating to the enormity—Overwhelm and Discouragement, Expectation and Pressure, and Am I Doing Enough and Insecurity. Participants were asked to describe the block where your church is located and what their ministry journey has been like. They were also asked to describe their greatest need as an African American pastor serving in the city of Philadelphia during this surge of gun violence.

Table 5

Understanding the Pastoral Experience as it Relates to Expectations



Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of Expectation Themes

The pie chart shows the sub themes that tie into Expectations. Overwhelm (26%) and Expectations and Pressure (24%) take up half of the pie. The co-researchers shared significant accounts, a 21% slice of the pie, that critiqued, “Am I Doing Enough?” to address community concerns, especially concerns perpetuating gun violence and other violent crimes. Insecurity (13%) and Discouragement (10%) outweighed positive perceptions, namely the Privilege and Honor of being a pastor, which only represents 6% of the pie. It’s undeniable that pastors experience feelings of overwhelming pressure, discouragement, and insecurity in ministry. However, despite the uncomfortableness and often silent grievances as it relates to expectations

for pastors, the role of a pastor is still regarded to be a privilege and an honor as reported by most the co-researchers.

Overwhelm and Discouragement. All the participants reflected on stints of discouragement with regards to overall pastoral ministry.

It's discouraging because of the gentrification and the violence, the growing needs within the education system and our young people. I struggle with "am I doing enough? Are we relevant enough? Are we a liberation church or a containment church?" (PASTOR ROYAL)

There's a sense of resignation due to the lack of growth, lack of concern for the relevance of our church to the community. To the extent that I am aware, other church expressions and houses of worship draw more people in and seem to exhibit a higher interest level and involvement level, like the Masjid down the street, or young churches or churches that have younger congregations. In other words, others are growing and we're not. And there's curiosity. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

Pastoring has its ups and downs. Funerals for people you become very close to, whether it is expected or unexpected. People leaving the church can be an emotional blow as well, because sometimes they leave with no explanation. Sometimes, being within the neighborhood seems like I am all by myself because the area that we live in or the area that my church is in, predominantly Islamic. So, sometimes it can be very emotional trying to seek help within the area as far as partnerships because of that religious divide. (PASTOR DANA)

[My congregation is] focused on the area of poverty and violence. I am a pastor serving the second poorest zip code in the city of Philadelphia, and as you can imagine, it is the second most violent zip code in Philadelphia. If you looked at a map of the most impoverished neighborhoods, an overlay with the map of where the most violence and violent crime happens in Philadelphia, you would think you were looking at the same map. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

Some co-researchers have also experienced frustration due to lack of church support, community cooperation, or government intervention.

[The pastors] still have to generate an awareness of trying to let the congregation know, even though they didn't lose anybody, that this is why all of this is important to them, as well. So, you're trying to navigate being relevant, being on top of the administration and caring- the daily running of the church, as well as trying to be engaged in the community and trying to be a change agent... (PASTOR ROYAL)

My biggest frustration and the toll that it's taking on my health and my emotions is knowing that much of this can be stopped and prevented, if the highest level of government would figure out a way to work together. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

[Pastors] can't do anything on their own. I'm one person, and if people don't help to support the effort, we could never fully tackle the issue. They don't snitch. Don't do this. Don't do that. It cripples our community to where things continue to go on and spiral out of control. I think if there's more support, if we support each other, stop fighting each other, and stop shooting each other down, we can come out on top. (PASTOR DANA)

All the co-researchers have observed and personally experienced criticism. PASTOR SIDNEY compared public scrutiny being “constantly under a microscope.” Participants have experienced criticism as a regular part of pastoral ministry, even during periods of acclimation. PASTOR ROYAL recalled having to deal with people who were not always nice, “not necessarily to me but to each other.” Most had experienced criticism from a wider audience after a traumatic event or when there is a pressing community concern. “Folks are always asking.” PASTOR SIDNEY explains, “what did your church do to help the community in the middle of this?” Hence, all the pastors described the experience of serving in the midst of gun violence as doing and seeing everything, from navigating the dynamics of the family to managing every single emotion and from preaching a public message to all that life is valuable to helping the family understand that, even if the victim was the perpetrator, that nobody deserves for someone to take their life.

Many co-researchers experienced overwhelmed feelings while responding to traumatic events, particularly gun violence. Such experiences included suffering with the community in experiences that this is not fair (PASTOR TAYLOR), having to reflect a faith that in the moment you don’t have because you are not sure that this is ever going to end (PASTOR ROYAL), or feeling compelled to obtain your own license to carry a gun due to the rise in violence (PASTOR DANA). The overwhelm was described by some as a heaviness in the area that they serve. Still, many of the participants were able to hold on to the idea that “bad things work together for good” which made it easier for them to endure much of what they see and are exposed to.

Most co-researchers shared that they experienced comfort and relief upon receiving closure for an incident or affirmation from someone served. PASTOR DANA found relief when

he was certain that a member of his congregation would survive a gunshot wound. Whereas PASTOR TAYLOR recalls finding relief when the funeral is over, and the family can begin the healing process. Pastors also described a sense of peace and happiness when they can help someone and put a smile on their face. PASTOR ROYAL says, “I don’t always feel like I am in the right place doing the right thing, but I find peace when my work is affirmed.” She later recalled a moment when a woman reached out to her to let her know that she found the scripture that she preached from during a funeral service.

PASTOR ROYAL explained that when someone says that the words you shared or what you did for their family member’s funeral meant a lot to them, it makes her feel good. PASTOR HARPER described certainty that he did the right thing as not just a relief but satisfying: “I gave hope to the family, and it is the work of God as he moves through [the pastor] and to them. So, it makes you feel like I hit a three-pointer at 0.9 seconds. It is not the same feeling of enthusiasm when you win the game. It is a feeling of satisfaction.” Some of the co-researchers reported that people minister to them, noting that when they provide relief for people, the people end up helping and providing relief for them as well. Some participants also said that they can work out their issues regarding overall pastoral overwhelm and stress related to gun violence ministry through therapy, connections, and pastoral accountability. Still, many pastors had trouble finding true relief.

All the co-researchers shared an experience to some degree that their needs are not being met by the church; this includes the universal church, their denominational church, the congregation, and to some small regard, themselves. The resounding need of pastors was rest. However, PASTOR SIDNEY explained that there is no such thing as a sabbath rest because

there are no pauses nor any opportunities for a pastor to step away. This is described as an external pressure but also an internalized belief: “Who is going to help them, greet the people, be with the people, sober angry and retaliatory people, etc., if I am not there?” (PASTOR HARPER) Some of the pastors shared a need for time to get away, whether it was for a training or training-free to solely focus on relaxation. One pastor stressed the need for a place to “decompress, commiserate and come together as a community with people who truly know what it is like to be me?”

Most of the pastors expressed a need “to be as black as they wanted to be” (PASTOR ROYAL) and to have the freedom to be their authentic selves. Many of the co-researchers expressed the weight of navigating Blackness, what it means to be a person of color in communities that they are not accepted, or what it was like to be a person of color day in and day out. There was a sense that, especially in the diverse and seemingly tolerant area like Germantown, there wasn’t a place for them to share those experiences unapologetically, without having to downplay experiences for people, or without the judgment or labels of being angry.

Expectation and Pressure. Many co-researchers reported that they perform self-assessments on their ministry engagement. Some review their day and interactions to determine what they did wrong and could have done better. Others question themselves immediately after an interaction: “Did I stay too long? Did I say too much or not enough, etc.?” Some co-researchers experienced this as something that keeps them up at night. PASTOR ROYAL shared that concerns cause her to wake up in the middle of the night to evaluate. These considerations are mostly to make their ministry more effective and to be “better for the next time.” (PASTOR TAYLOR) Additionally, most participants shared the understanding that they never know what

to expect but they know that they need to be prepared and ready because a pastor is expected to lead.

There's an expectation and tradition that the pastor in urban, black settings would lead the way. He was the most involved person in the community. Some are evaluated by how much time they spend in the church office while others recognize that they need to be in the streets and in the community, standing and getting to know people. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

People are looking at me and I am doing everything... [the pastor has] to be exactly what the family needs you to be. (PASTOR ROYAL)

My part-time job goes over-the-time. (PASTOR JODY)

By vocation, [pastors] are being stretched so thin. It is difficult to fulfill many of the roles. Sometimes we show up with a bucket of Faboloso. Sometimes, we are therapists. We put on different hats based on the community needs. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

Considering preparation, most co-researchers explained that there was an etiquette to congregational and community engagement. Pastors are not to alienate themselves from the world when preaching and teaching; this is experienced as an expectation that they have held for themselves. Participants shared that they follow the model of having the Bible in one hand and, in the other, a newspaper, or the remote to watch the news, or an application that sends them alerts. Pastors prepare in this fashion because they have a deep interest in knowing their community better, they hold the conviction that they were called for “such a time as this,” or they deem it irresponsible, otherwise.

All the co-researchers also demonstrated a similarly high expectation for the church. “The country is the way it is today because as a community of churches we choose to go inside and shut our doors and let them deal with whatever was going on out there,” says PASTOR ROYAL, “That breaks God's heart too.” PASTOR TAYLOR says it is the church’s responsibility to be engaged and to raise awareness, “not because gun violence has hit their household or will hit their household.” He emphasizes the need for church involvement because the pastor, as one man, is not qualified to speak into everything. However, there is an expectation that the church—all the people—can do it together. Hence, it is expected that the pastor raises people up and helps members “discover, uncover, and fulfill their purpose.”

Some of the participants stated that ministers should have, as well as show up with, a pastor’s heart, even if he or she is showing up in another professional or personal capacity. One participant says that is what makes his work outside of the church value-oriented (PASTOR CASSIDY). PASTOR HARPER says that pastoral ministry is not always about instant gratification or gratification at all. Similarly, many of the participants described pastoral ministry as personally rewarding although as a public ministry, it could be considered a thankless job. PASTOR HARPER further explains using Jesus’ encounters with the ten people with leprosy and an illustration. He stresses that only one of the people with leprosy who received a clean bill of health came back to Jesus and gave thanks. “When we look at the church in the community, we can minister to ten people and only one comes to the church. And you would see that as your eternal life rate,” PASTOR HARPER explains, “But the actual numbers don't matter, if you are doing it for the Kingdom.” He uses scripture to affirm that the Kingdom rejoices when just one can be saved and shares a conviction that we cannot see the impact of what that one person could

do. “It could be a pollinating effect,” PASTOR ROYAL says, “that one person could do greater things beyond our church.” On the other hand, some pastors recognize that there are quite a few pastors that are not genuine in their pursuit to address the community’s needs. There is an impression that there are churches and ministries that use these traumatic experiences as “a photo opportunity or a means to gain name recognition or to grow their church.” (PASTOR TAYLOR)

Insecurity and Am I Doing Enough. Most co-researchers experienced an insecurity of ability regarding the sense of urgency related to elevated levels of urban problems such as gun violence, unemployment, and criminal activity, while having limited skills and education as well as part-time availability. Serving at a quarter-time, PASTOR CASSIDY described his role as “extremely part-time” which also impacts his timeliness in situations. Still, he often feels restless since he does not always know what he could be doing and understands that even if he was aware and well-trained, he wouldn’t have the time to do those things. Although most participants attributed racism to some of the urban issues pastors had to confront, some had a challenging time presenting racially charged messages that could empower African Americans without making White people feel attacked, judged, or guilty for being who they were. Some co-researchers also questioned their ability to make an impact when intervening in urban violence.

How do you counsel someone not to do and deal drugs? (PASTOR TAYLOR)

[At a funeral,] trauma, grief, and sadness are packed in the room, and I wonder if these words I am saying are making a difference. This is a container of grief when this is supposed to be a celebration of life. I feel helpless and as though I am speaking empty words. (PASTOR JODY)

Gun violence is prevalent. When we talk about young men killing each other, it has to deal with them having no hope. Let's say eight of them are making good money on the street. "Why do you (the young men) want to trade in that?" He adds, "Why do you want to trade it in to work at Wal-Mart? Trade to make minimum wage, eight bucks, or 15 bucks an hour? They have to have a gun to protect their brand and their turf by whatever means necessary." (PASTOR HARPER)

Most co-researchers experienced redemption for their insecurity as demonstrated by their use of Isaiah 55:11 (NIV), "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." There seemed to be a shared understanding in doing their part and leaving the rest up to God, trusting that God Spirit "does what it does." (PASTOR JODY) This gives them the courage to move through insecure experiences with the hope that they can make changes or improve in time for the next opportunity. Even when a pastor doubts their call or effectiveness, some participants reported that encouragement comes just at the right time when a nudge or boost of confidence is needed. PASTOR HARPER recalls having people tell him, "I'm so glad you came. Nobody was here for me. You came out of nowhere. How did you know? I didn't expect this." Such experiences of opportune times or being "the one" to meet the need helps alleviate insecurity, uncertainty, and imposter syndrome.

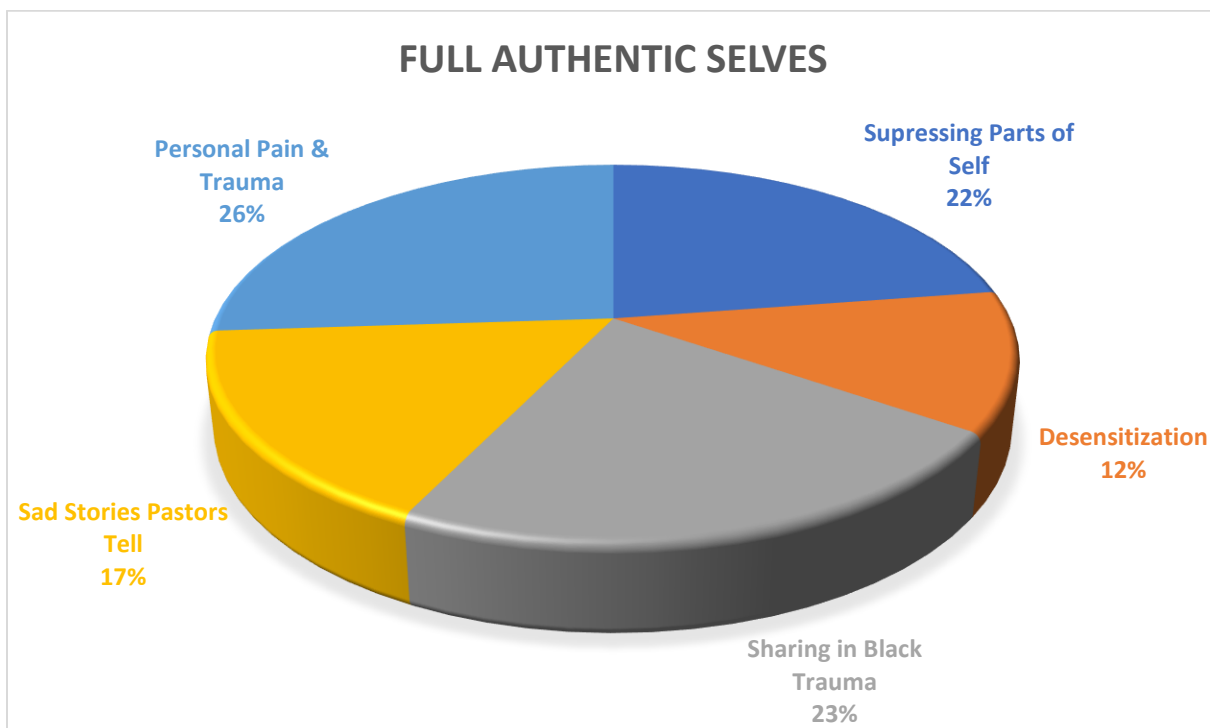
Full Authentic Selves

In the fourth theme, Full Authentic Selves, co-researchers express that they are shepherding people through traumatic times while they themselves are traumatized. Several sub

themes emerged relating to the balancing act of managing personal and community trauma. These included Personal Pain, Sharing in Black Trauma, and Suppression. Participants were asked to reflect on times when they suffered with the community due to gun violence. They also walked the interviewer through detailed experiences related to Philadelphia’s current surge of gun violence.

Table 6

Understanding the Pastoral Experience as it Relates to One’s Full Authentic Self



Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of Full Authentic Self Themes

The pie chart shows the sub themes that tie into Full Authentic Selves. The chart shows that pastors experience a great deal of personal and collective pain and trauma—Personal Pain and Trauma (26%) and Sharing in Black Pain (23%). This makes for quite a few sad stories for pastors to tell (17%). However, one-third of the chart represents significant accounts of pastor suppression and desensitization. Therefore, personally, and professionally, it can be assumed that pastors have a hard time connecting to people, their own pain, and the stories that they tell as well as processing their pain in a way that is authentic and effective.

Personal Pain and Trauma. Most of the co-researchers experienced pastoring as a balancing act between the many facets and concerns of their lives. The toll was described as heavy for someone who is trying to be a leader, a single parent, a community member, a spouse, and a grandparent, who then must compound all of that with concerns about safety in those areas of one's life. PASTOR SIDNEY described the struggle as “just trying to do life.” He shared the sentiments of many other participants who felt that people still rely on the pastor to be different—having the answers, being the rock in the community, and having it all together amid confusion and chaos. PASTOR ROYAL said, “People want you to show up as super pastor with all the answers. Sometimes, you are angry as well.” Some co-researchers shared that vocation, specifically a pastor's public facing ministry, trumped a pastor's personal pain. If a pastor is there to pastor, then that is what the pastor is supposed to do. (PASTOR ROYAL) PASTOR TAYLOR describes this as pushing one's feelings aside to focus on the needs and the ranges of emotions of the people.

All the pastors had their own personal experiences of trauma, whether it be adverse childhood experiences or recent incidents that caused pain. PASTOR CASSIDY shared the

details of a recent robbery of his sister, who was attacked and thrown to the ground by a group of teens as she was getting out of her car. The impact was traumatizing. His sister, he explains, does not want to leave her home, and exhibits some of the long-lasting effects of such a traumatic ordeal. PASTOR HARPER asked that we not underestimate the powerful impact on the life of a child that does not have his father in his life. While he admitted that he has an active and present father, he recognized the differences in upbringing of his younger siblings who were “not raised by the same man that he knew growing up.” While many of the co-researchers agreed that the father brings affirmation and stability to one’s life, PASTOR HARPER had to pause during the interview to accept feelings what he could not put into words after he realized that although he had a fond memories of his father, it hurt to know that as some he looked up to as a role model, “the only time he saw him in church was at his own funeral.”

PASTOR SIDNEY has wrestled with multiple instances of trauma. “My first experience with trauma was being raped by a family member. I’ve been, since then, put in situations,” he explains, “whether it was through sexual abuse or abandonment, dealing with a father that was both a drug dealer and a drug user, being exposed to the family business of drugs and sex trafficking on my father’s side, deployment and seeing war, and then being called to ministry to face spiritual warfare.” Most pastors shared those individual experiences of grace not only made them more empathetic and sympathetic but, it also made it possible for them to see and endure all that they have been through and keep going.

Participants also had a plethora of childhood experiences of family members bringing guns in the house, being arrested, being shot in domestic disputes, or dying of a drug overdose. One participant even shared that at one point in his life, he lived a different lifestyle than one of a

pastor. “Women have more influence over men than other men, because when they are really focused, and they love as my wife loved me- I wasn't perfect. I was out in the street, but my wife brought me in, and she led me to Christ.” (PASTOR HARPER) PASTOR CASSIDY said “the closest I ever had a gun in my face” was years ago as he recounted the story of his taxicab driver and two men in a car ahead of him pulling their guns in a fit of road rage after a driving dispute. Like many stories co-researchers shared about children and young people who were slain within blocks of their home or on their way home, PASTOR CASSIDY shared that the incident took place right next to where he was.

Sharing in Black Trauma. All co-researchers affirmed that they share in the common horror of urban gun violence with the community. Yet, some experienced feelings of distance and desensitization. PASTOR CASSIDY explained that small churches sometimes mean that maybe only 1-2 people inside of the congregation experience the pain of gun violence which can make it more important for a pastor to share and bring the congregation closer to the issue. PASTOR SIDNEY thinks that it is not necessary a far proximity to gun violence that makes congregations and even community members seem unmoved. It could possibly be that they are too close to the trauma, passing signs- yellow tape, chalk, memorials, etc.- of gun violence. “I see our community in some respects how to cope by becoming desensitized,” he says. Having played as a musician for over 1,500, admittedly, PASTOR TAYLOR says he, too, is desensitized to death. PASTOR ROYAL also shared that even though she is with the family or present at vigils, she sometimes feels as though she, as the pastor, is on the outside looking in. Many co-researchers still shared the key role pastors play as a co-victim of gun related trauma.

We receive the wounds of people who have entered a world that is already broken. We are there to cry alongside those who have been left behind. (PASTOR JODY)

I know what they feel. They are looking to me for guidance and counseling and I am able to meet their needs because when I share, they understand that it is authentic. People can recognize the real from the fake. (PASTOR ROYAL)

Some of the pastors shared the same experience of a shooting that took place on August 19, 2021. Experience generated fear and concern among both congregations and the community that pastors had to navigate feelings of anger, disappointment, frustration, shock, and disbelief. PASTOR DANA said that not only did that shooting happen across the street from his church, but two others happened there as well. “Then there was another shooting where sixty-five rounds were found at the corner found on the ground. The area is remarkably busy at any given time, you do not know what could happen,” he says, “due to all of the drug activity and violence.” PASTOR TAYLOR shared that his congregation was cognizant that the unusual time that their service let out saved church members that would have been across the street at the time of the shooting.

Suppressing Parts of Self. Some co-researchers experienced a pressure to be strong even when they feel upset, weak, or heavy hearted. PASTOR ROYAL shared that she does not always feel faith. She reasons that if she revealed the feelings that she does not show and fell apart, the people would too. “No matter how I feel,” PASTOR ROYAL says, “at the end of the day, I am responsible for imparting on the people, ‘This is what the word of God says. This is what the faith walk is like.’” She resolves, “I can try to be real and tell them this is troubling me but that is the extent.” PASTOR DANA affirmed that pastors do get angry as he described his experience

among frontline spiritual leaders present marching and leading prayer vigils during the unrest in Philadelphia after the police-involved shooting death of Walter Wallace. PASTOR DANA stated that he was present during the protest because they were happening all the time and in his area. This created an opportunity for him and other faith leaders, especially those in government roles, to engage. He also realized after stopping to engage them that White people, wearing all black and masks came from Virginia, North Caroline, and other states with book bags full of bricks and weapons, “giving them out to African Americans, the African American Community. And the [African Americans] were the ones getting locked up and in trouble for it.”

PASTOR DANA was shocked by the dynamic of his clergy group being local and all black, in the trenches, and promoting peace in comparison to the other group, starting trouble and encouraging Black hurting people to loot their hometown. He further explains that they had confiscated a bookbag and discovered the bricks. He described the experience as an interesting experience because they were, obviously, outnumbered as people trying to bring peace when the whole city was in an uproar. “But there was one thing that sticks out to me is that everyone did not like what we were doing. There were some people that were for the violence and the looting. PASTOR DANA goes on to explain that one of the white protestors went to a port-o-potty, pulled the contents out of the toilet, and threw it all over the clergy. He explained that they were content that that was the protestors' response to trying to break up the looting until they realized that it was not water or soda. “Wait” he recalls saying, “this is the stuff that they put in a port-o-potty.” Realizing that it was all over him, PASTOR DANA shared, “I was like, ‘wow!’ Now, I want to fight.”

PASTOR JODY witnessed a trial as an aspiring attorney in a high school mock-trial program and the brother of a victim in a domestic violence dispute. “It was the case of a jealous girlfriend,” he says, “where my brother was turning from her as he shot and he was shot in the rear end, which means if he had to turn you can imagine what she was shooting for.” Per his account, the experience caused PASTOR JODY to deal with right and wrong, morality and faith, trying it all at once. He was, at that moment in court, the victim and the attorney. He shared that although not having yet come out to himself as gay, he was already wrestling with the many parts of himself that could experience one moment. Further, he recalls the attorneys laughing at his brother’s situation in the courtroom, not realizing or seemingly caring that his family was in the courtroom. PASTOR JODY reflects on the situation stating, “In the sadness and them treating comedy and tragedy as one, I later had the revelation of the humor in the situation. Praise God that it was not fatal. For if the bullet were over a bit more, it would have hit a vital artery. So, comedy is a valuable tool to think of the ridiculousness of the human condition. It does not make sense; it’s ridiculous.”

Some co-researchers experienced self-imposed censorship. “I struggle with how Black I should be when I talk about Black History Month or Martin Luther King, Jr. Day,” says PASTOR ROYAL, who serves a racially diverse congregation that was historically White. PASTOR CASSIDY suppressed journalist-mode in a moment that exposed the unresponsiveness of police. He wanted to ask tough questions and was thinking of headlines as he watched his community members shake their heads in response to police activity. PASTOR JODY on the other hand, took an opportunity when interviewed by the daily news to speak his heart on the events that followed a community tragedy. He simply stated that he did not want people to come

out and then go back to normal life. Inspired by his authenticity, another pastor contacted PASTOR JODY and they were able to create a program that provided safe corridors for students and mentors to encourage and work with grieving students.

In summary, the experiences of gun violence were understood through the lens of the call to be a pastor. It is a spiritual experience, requiring the anointing and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to provide a prophetic voice to the crisis of gun violence. As a call, pastoring is often experienced as more than a vocation- it is a role that can transcend environments. Therefore, pastors have experienced a need to be ready to speak, act, or offer themselves in whatever capacity the occasion calls for at any moment. This perception creates a weightiness that can be felt physically, emotionally, and mentally.

The pastoral experience has been externally overwhelming. Yet, pastors seemingly have internalized expectations that place unhealthy pressures on their ministry, all to which impacts self-esteem and confidence. Overwhelmed pastors can exceed perceived expectations and still question whether they are effective or if they are doing enough. Insecurity and self-scrutiny are what keeps them up at night. Admittedly, pastors are also pastoring while traumatized, having shared in the community's pain amid gun violence and experienced their own pain, ranging from trauma in childhood, the struggles of every city life, the plight of being Black, and tragic and violent crimes that hit close to him.

Research Question 2, Facing the Surge of Gun Violence

This section will address the research question: How are Black Pastors Facing the Surge of Gun Violence in Philadelphia? Relevant interview questions were designed to prompt

dialogue regarding the experience of accepting gun violence as a detrimental community reality and dealing with it as such. The goal was to highlight the meaning of each participant's experience thematically. The researcher did so by reiterating participant stories under specific interview questions, which is Step 4: Situated Narratives of the general data analysis steps.

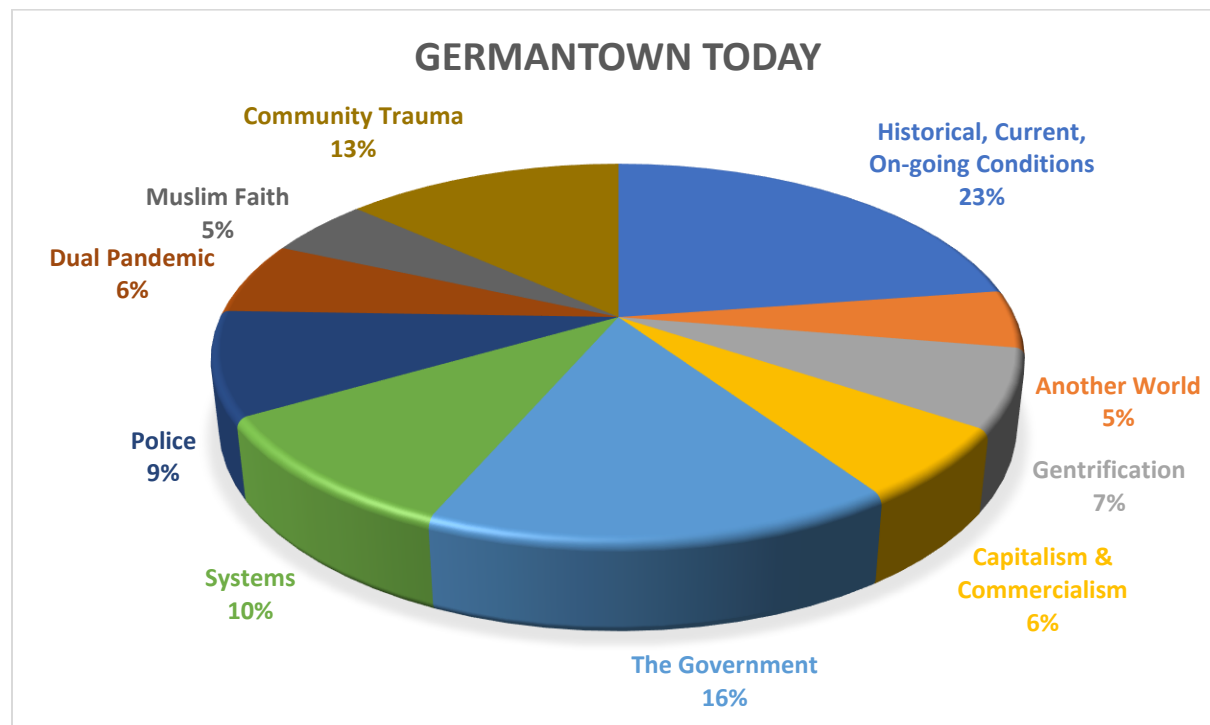
(Peoples, 2021) The relevant themes were Germantown Today, God is Here, Gun Violence, and Relationships. The researcher then created a descriptive narrative (Step 5) to respond to the research question.

Germantown Today

Germantown Today is the first theme. Co-researchers expressed disunity being a primary hindrance with regards to meeting community needs and resolving gun violence and other community ills. A few sub themes emerged relating to disunity and culpability. These included Historical, On-going, and Current Conditions, Community Trauma, and Government and Systems. Participants were asked to provide sensory details about their pastoral experiences of community life in Germantown.

Table 7

Understanding the Pastoral Experience of Germantown Today



Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of Germantown Today Themes

The pie chart shows the sub themes that tie into Germantown Today. Historical, Current, On-going Conditions top the chart at 23%. The Government (16%) and Community Trauma (13%) come in second and third, respectively. Systems (10%) and Police (9%) appear as prevalent factors of post-covid Germantown, Philadelphia. The Muslim Faith, a Dual Pandemic, Capitalism, Gentrification, and the notice of another world (5%) all tie into the unique make-up of this Philadelphia section. Per the participant reports, it is not surprising that The Government is presenting as a leading factor. Three types of people—people of Muslim faith, law enforcement workers, and government officials- and a few specific systems—gentrification,

capitalism, another world, dual pandemic—are named factors which leads to the perspective that the current state of Germantown stems from relational and process issues.

Historical, On-going, and Current Conditions. Most co-researchers understood and experienced Philadelphia to be different in comparison to any city around it, even the sections of Germantown, Mt. Airy, and Chestnut Hill, which are “right next to each other and they're so different.” (PASTOR ROYAL) As pastors, especially those coming into the city and section to serve, they adjust to a Philly mentality that is much different than any area that they have ever served. All the pastors acknowledged the numerous ways the community continues to change.

The community is changing, by gentrification, and I mean it's diverse. You can have White, Black, Latino, and Asians. You can have a person that's on the lower socio-economic scale and something that's a millionaire in the same area. (PASTOR ROYAL)

It's an interesting culture. Sunday [makes the area of interest] a ghost town. When the Drexel and Temple students are there and when they are not, it's like a different culture, two different cities, and we have to prioritize some activities and events based on that.
(PASTOR TAYLOR)

Many co-researchers have experienced a change in what things mean not just in this city but in this era, as well. For instance, identity could mean one's sense of pride, territory, and the image or material things someone possesses. Some pastors reported that people want to protect that. Some pastors also assess the new understanding of differences and how they are handled. “It's a different time,” PASTOR DANA explains, “People don't want to use their hands and be embarrassed so shooting is the new solution to these disagreements. People do not know how to

handle disagreements. The new solution higher than hands is shooting.” PASTOR ROYAL further explains that disagreements can mean anything now, from something as simple as “You stepped on my shoes” to road rage, losing at a game, and a wide range of offense.

All the participants described the make of the architectural area surrounding their church to have business, mostly storefronts, education buildings ranging from childcare centers to university sites, all while being mostly residential. They could also identify at least two other places of worship nearby. Both White Flight and Gentrification were described by many participants as community development processes that were working their way up most of the participant’s block. Two pastors explained that these community shifts made Germantown Churches on the edge of the section more diverse although there’s still undertones of division. PASTOR ROYAL reported that she was the first Black, woman pastor for a congregation whose first appointed minority pastor served only a term before her. Her appointment came around the time when her congregation was healing from a “really ugly, nasty split based on LGBTQ a theology.” PASTOR ROYAL says, “[LGBTQ theology] was part of it, but it was really more communication and miscommunication. So, for me, the experiences were seeing people come together after being so alienated from one another.”

All the participants experienced the busyness of the area as it relates to people to be a part of the Germantown experience. Some of the busyness was described as the residential nature of the neighborhood, the daily of schedule of activities at the local Germantown Masjid, the many shelters for people who are homeless or survivors of domestic violence, a significant presence of police, the constant presence of emergency personnel and vehicles, the people coming and going of people using the 65 Bus or other means of public transportation, and the people that crowd the

parks- drug and needle parks. PASTOR TAYLOR describes it as a cultural melting pot. During business hours, many participants reported high criminal activity occurring in broad daylight such as multiple carjackings, drug trafficking, violent fights and fights that end in shootings, and gun purchases. One participant shared that some of these issues date back to the Nixon Administration. (PASTOR HARPER) Many participants reported that these community issues were exasperated by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. PASTOR CASSIDY explained, “Gun purchases and ownership has increased. There is a sense of needing a gun when there’s desperation and a scarcity of things. The anxiety and scarcity related to the supply issue [caused by the shutdown] lead to violence. These extenuating factors caused violence to breed upon itself.”

All the participants shared that gun violence is a symptom of the root of the problem; it was also further described as a “smoke screen” (PASTOR ROYAL) and “a tentacle” (PASTOR ROYAL, PASTOR DANA, PASTOR TAYLOR, PASTOR JODY) of interconnected problems. “Gun violence is the consequence of poverty and lack of opportunity, brokenness, and parents not being home,” says PASTOR DANA. He and PASTOR TAYLOR would agree that this current generation is not as concerned with the household. Also, “there aren’t many two parent homes,” PASTOR TAYLOR says, “or conditions where one parent can be at home while the other parent works.” Some of the participants shared that they witnessed processes like Gentrification push people out of the community by creating poverty through inflated costs and new taxes- soda taxes, etc. (PASTOR HARPER) One participant said that even the “Mom and Pop” stores and corner store bodegas are hiking up the prices so that people cannot afford anything.

Some pastors shared that the police-involved shooting death of George Floyd created another pandemic that churches had to deal with. Even though many participants reported that the death of George Floyd and other police-involved shootings impacted the Black community nationally in 2020, some participants found themselves torn between the lack of concern of the shootings that were happening as close as next door to them. A few pastors had to wrestle with church flight and their congregations wanting to abandon the community and gun violence issue by relocating. PASTOR DANA shared his frustration on a few occasions regarding the lack of responsiveness to host a vigil or march as a proactive prevention method rather than an aftermath activity. “We need to consider how people are getting killed by each other every day but only moving when a white person and cop kills someone,” he says.

PASTOR HARPER shared a revelation regarding all of the pandemics the church continues to navigate, “The gun violence pandemic cannot be contained.” He explains that this violence is based on the hearts of men which are “deceptive and deceitfully wicked,” and it does not matter the weapon of choice- bare hands included. PASTOR HARPER reasons, people will do and think evil things; gun violence is an inventive way people have decided to kill people. Through a sermon, he presented that revelation to his congregation, encouraging them not to be fearful of the pandemic or gun violence. Instead, continue to “be a light and not hidden under the bushel.” (PASTOR HARPER)

Community Trauma. All the pastors reported on incidents and conditions that were disturbing as well as distressing to the community, experiencing it as shared trauma.

The trauma is real. To be black in this city, [pastors are] dealing with mass incarceration. When we're dealing with poverty- extreme poverty, when we're dealing

with police misconduct, when we're dealing with gun violence at an all-time high, and when we're dealing with the global pandemic, vicarious trauma is real. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

Congregants are afraid to gather in church due to safety concerns. We can still see the bullet holes in the windows of the barbershops. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

They saw that the police were doing their investigation, still saw all the bullet holes through the glass and everything that went on. One person did die, one person was murdered. They were pronounced dead at the scene. It was a very tragic event. In those situations, you don't know what to do or what will come next, even after you've offered your prayer. The next thing that I'm thinking about is who's getting ready to get retaliation, because this is now going to continue on. (PASTOR DANA)

Gun violence can be something else in terms of race, especially when you see the number of black boys between the ages of 12 and 16 killed all over the city, and then the police department not bringing justice or finding the killer, but you see the killer found for a temple student. Also, stuff is happening in broad daylight. There is "no snitching," capitalism, gang activity, and several other systems at play. (PASTOR ROYAL)

Along with gun violence, many of the detailed poverty in terms of homelessness or material need. One pastor shared a story of community members attempting to hop in the food distribution line pretending to be someone else. "Yes, that's the same person," he recalls telling the church members handing out the food, "just let them her on." Trauma is also found in "the suffering from drug abuse, drug addiction, alcohol addiction and everything in between."

(PASTOR TAYLOR) Still, PASTOR TAYLOR finds opportunity during those unfortunate circumstances. Similarly, PASTOR JODY was determined to break some of those cycles especially as it relates to gun violence. He shared that he invited a professor in to talk to his congregation about the systemic nature of gun violence in response to several members of the congregation currently being incarcerated for gun related crimes and murders.

One participant compared Philadelphia to wartime in Iraq (PASTOR SIDNEY), while many others lifted the correlation between the war in Ukraine to the violence, oppression, the PTSD, subsequent poor living conditions, and devastation in Philadelphia. Also, another participant said that Philadelphia is not a video game, recalling children are just trying to survive and then they experience the “reality of seeing blood and life leave a person's body. It is real.” (PASTOR ROYAL) Many pastors considered the possibility of war-like experiences in Philadelphia and several unaddressed mental health issues to the continuance and surges of crime in urban cities. This was affirmed by the accounts of some co-researchers shared in detail the impact of going away to war and what it can do to a person that returns to society untreated with stories of church members who had committed suicide, homicide, and other violent crimes.

Government and Systems. Most co-researchers saw the value of government involvement given their ministerial or professional experiences. PASTOR SIDNEY shared that policies, resources, and funding at the community level are available. In the government space, at policy tables or meetings, these discussions are happening. A few participants stated that they bring in government officials- state reps and state troopers, council members and government staff- to build relationships as well as discuss ways to support local or community-based groups that are focused on violence prevention work, education, or health disparities within Black and

brown neighborhoods. PASTOR TAYLOR says that it is a pastor's responsibility to ensure his congregation understands that there are resources beyond the gospel. "Essentially," he says, "a pastor is called to gather the sheep and govern social, academic, and political paradigms."

PASTOR TAYLOR allows this to direct his responses to gun violence for "regardless how a judge decides you should not rely on the system as a source of comfort. I have to spend that time helping people think things through."

Many co-researchers demonstrated a lack of trust and reliance in the government or current systems. PASTOR JODY says, "The criminal justice system is much more about the new Jim Crow as opposed to rehabilitating and healing and bringing people back into society." He has not observed it to create greater compassion and greater relational ties in support of the people such as young men that have served their country and then resort to committing crimes. Similarly, PASTOR HARPER says that there is a root to all of these "bullets flying over the course of a week." "Guns are the biggest problem," he says, "but the government does not see that. Guns don't kill people, but people cannot kill without guns."

Many clergy experienced infighting at the government, and even the church, level as a hindrance to efforts to end gun violence. PASTOR SIDNEY stated, "Blood is on the government's hand." He further explained that, working in government, knows that there are city officials not talking to each other. Fighting is happening at the highest level in our city, trickling down because of hypocrisy. "And you say to these young people, put down your gun?" he says, "How can you, and I won't say names, but how can you tell Brickyard (East Germantown) to stop beefing with Happy Hollow (Germantown), when you can't even talk to that city official? He explains that by not talking to one another, it impacts the whole institution and what

engagement looks like for other people, especially when it comes to “thinking through sensible policy and programing.”

Some other participants experienced differences and miscommunication issues at several other levels of the community and shared that it impacted community efforts. These levels included all expressions of Christian faith, specifically a divide between Christian and Muslim worships, infighting among Christian believers depending on their theological convictions as it relates to LGBTQ inclusion, gun violence, and how one responds, in faith, to other social justice issues, infighting among Black Christian pastors, and infighting or within the home (domestic violence) or larger family (extreme dysfunction). As leaders who share in the responsibility of aiding the community, there were also some reports of division among decisions and courses of action between the co-researchers and government officials, especially as it relates to capitalism, consumerism, and its impact on urban gun trade.

Although most of the participants experienced frustrations and concerns about policing, many participants shared accounts that seemingly understood the weightiness of being a pastor. Although they are government officials, there was a shared sense that police and pastors are in this together with regards to needed training, therapy, and support, as well as dealing with community level cooperation or the lack thereof (no snitching, etc.).

Did you know that the first officer that arrives on the scene must take the gunshot victim to the hospital? He has to pick up the victim's body, put them in his car, and transport him to the hospital. Can you imagine doing that every night? (PASTOR SIDNEY)

The police officers witnessed the brutal shooting. They were sitting in the wagon that's parked there and they did not respond at first? (PASTOR CASSIDY)

[The shooting] happened in front of police so there is no regard or respect for them, as well. They were outnumbered with all that was going on. I saw them afterwards; they were at a loss for words. (PASTOR DANA)

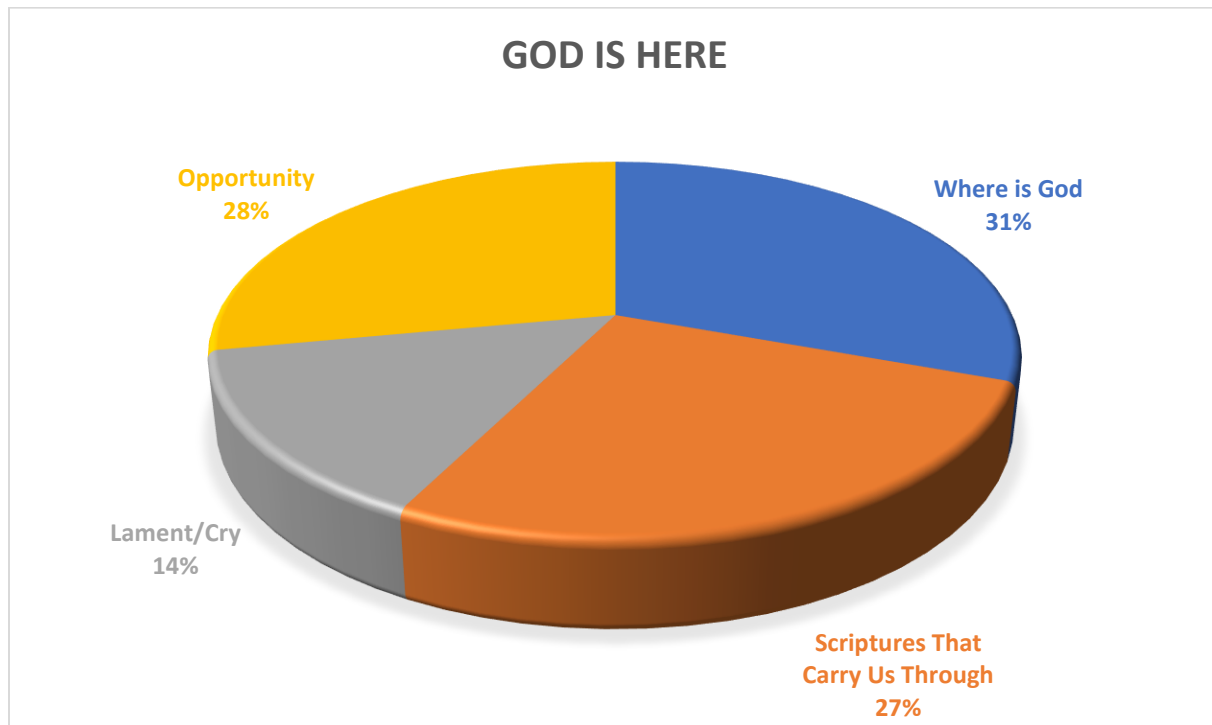
[Funerals] are high retaliation settings where security (earlier referenced as police) is more important than how people feel are in or impacted by the trauma. Nothing worse than having a funeral that creates seven other funerals because we were not prudent. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

God is Here

The second theme is God is Here. Co-researchers expressed that God is present in every regard as it relates to gun violence. A few sub themes emerged relating to God's presence and the perceived spiritual impact on gun violence. These included God is Here, Opportunities, and Scriptures that Carry Us Through. Participants were asked to describe their faith and theology amid gun violence. Participants introduced several scriptures in support of their perspective and explained how the word of God shapes their perspective and ability to pastor through the surge of gun violence.

Table 8

Understanding the Pastoral Experience as it Relates to the Presence of God



Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of God is Here Themes

The pie chart shows the sub themes that tie into God is Here. Nearly one-third of the pie represents Where is God (31%), particularly accounts of where God has revealed himself in urban communities and as it relates to gun violence. God is equally present in opportunities that the co-researchers described (28%) as well as the scriptures (27%) that shape the participants' theology and outlook on traumatic experiences. Participants also found God in the practice of lament as well as opportunities to breakdown and cry (15%). God can be found amid suffering and is near to those navigating and enduring surges of gun violence.

Where is God. All the co-researchers experienced God in the people living in their community. “Obviously, it is through the people.,” PASTOR TAYLOR says, “Our neighborhood prides itself in its levels of tolerance, meaning although predominantly Black we have a good mix of White, Latino, and Asian.” He further explains that there is a sizable number of group homes within the zip code, noting that group home residents may not be readily accepted in surrounding neighborhoods. Reports from co-researchers revealed that they see God in people as they engage in city life.

I see God across the street in an organization that is Unitarian. They have Black lives matters and LGBTQ signs. And when I walk up and down the street, I see the different flags and models and murals that people have up. I see God in that regard. (PASTOR ROYAL)

God is in the people we meet, despite what [a pastor] sees in the city, people have an understanding of God. (PASTOR HARPER)

All the co-researchers experienced God in the opportunities to address social issues in the community.

Man, God is everywhere. He's especially in the catchment area that we provide ministry; he is in the opportunity. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

God is in the presence of the churches that are trying to do ministry, including ours, especially the ministry that involves children. He's in the various expressions of faith- the masjid down the streets and the people wearing their custom religious attire. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

We see God in action because the church is an expression of God. We really see God in opportunity that's expressed through poverty and homelessness. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

Opportunities. All the co-researchers experienced euphoria at simply the possibilities of opportunities that could reverse issues in the community such as gentrification and recurrences of violent crime. Many pastors demonstrated excitement when detailing the actions and outcomes of previous, current, and planned pursuits.

There is nothing new under the sun, and history tends to cycle- repeat itself- depending on what's going on. Even in scripture, there are a lot of things that are not too pleasing, but God is still here keeping us. He's ever present. (PASTOR DANA)

God is in the ability to educate and encourage the people to take advantage of the opportunity and to buy while cheap. Land ownership and home ownership is tied to generational wealth, and we are trying to educate and empower the people. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

All the co-researchers experienced God's presence in their work, both the opportunities to serve as a pastor and through other professional fields. PASTOR ROYAL explains, "God is in [a pastor's] Christian walk and in our sanctifying work." Most of the pastors agreed that their work was relational, even from the pulpit.

I am always constantly aware of God's presence in my pastoral ministry, even when it's coming up with a sermon. If I thought it was me having to come up with that sermon, I would feel like, "oh, no, I'm not capable of that," but God seems to bless me with the

sermons [to share with people] and I am trying to preach them to God's satisfaction.

(PASTOR CASSIDY)

God is in the invoking of his spirit and finding something meaningful together during the eulogy. (PASTOR JODY)

All the participants experienced God's presence in the midst of gun violence. "Just as Jesus wept, he is weeping alongside us," says PASTOR JODY. Not only is he physically present, but he is in the words they did not know they had to say, he's in the miraculous change in doctor's reports or events, and he is also moments that summon the pastor and the church to take a good look at themselves and the way their engagement aids or alleviates the problem.

God is in the signs and wonders, the miracles where people do not die. (PASTOR HARPER)

I wonder if God is reminding us of how far we have fallen with capitalism, commercialism, and indifference, and these [acts of gun violence] may be gentle nudges for us to be the light he has called us to be. (PASTOR ROYAL)

Whether it was through community services or a strong conviction to act, all the co-researchers have met needs that they perceive could mitigate community violence.

Our missionaries are creating a community garden and involving the community, our neighbors. The missionaries are an extension ministry of our church that helps create access for people through our parsonage. While I am not aware of everything that they do, I am grateful that they are there. Since we are not doing stuff, we can work alongside the missionaries to do stuff. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

Every person must ask what they can do. We need to speak the truth, stop walking with blinders, and have priorities in the wrong place- in the God spot. We need to have tough conversations. We need to help change conditions- let kids know that they are beloved so that they don't grow up to carjack us. (PASTOR JODY)

Some of the co-researchers found God in the opportunities to engage with young people. PASTOR HARPER discussed mentorship opportunities not only for young Black males but for young women, as well. He and some other participants would agree that young women are having children with the intention of loving them. Yet, they do not know how to raise them or have the faith to guide them. PASTOR JODY says mentorship programs provide safe spaces for young people to gain social skills and how to resolve conflict. PASTOR TAYLOR said beyond alleviating the social issues children face, his ministry accelerates young people in a sense that it helps them find their purpose in focus and focus on college and careers. PASTOR HARPER would describe it as “taking a gun out of their hand and putting something better inside of it.” Some of the pastors shared that the physical location of their churches allows them to see the need with children and pursue resolutions.

We see the demeanors, behavioral patterns of youth- their language choices, how they express themselves. So, we are appreciative that God has placed us in an environment where there are lots of opportunities to serve and be an expression of love. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

We can't be afraid of our young boys. We have to take opportunities to speak to them even if you catch them doing something you don't like. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

God is in the young people. You can get across to them. Young people are not defensive, like the millennial, they can still be reached. They are receptive to love and are kind, despite violence. I see hope in them. The adults are the ones that are a mess. So, it is up to us to change it up. (PASTOR HARPER)

Some of the clergy shared that there is an opportunity for pastors to interrupt gun violence. PASTOR CASSIDY discussed a desire to build better connections so that his response to gun violence can be timelier and at the very least, not after the fact. PASTOR HARPER recalled an opportunity to pray for an angry family that was planning retaliatory action. PASTOR DANA also intervened when a family was planning retaliatory action by pulling a member to the side and confronting him with better reasoning. PASTOR SIDNEY shared that he commits one month- 31 days- twice a year to time on the streets in his neighborhood, interrupting gun violence between 9 PM and midnight which is a time period of high gun-related crime. PASTOR ROYAL noted that it is helpful when we create opportunities for people to experience relief by talking about gun violence and their grief.

Scriptures That Carry Pastors Through. Most co-researchers spoke of having a faith in things unseen as a motivating factor. They have not experienced that unseen thing yet, but they have greatly experienced anticipation.

In Corinthians 4:18, Paul talked about focusing on the things that are unseen. Things seen are temporal. [Pastors] have to believe in an opportunity when we don't even see it. You can imagine what I've seen during my military deployments at a very young age and growing up in Philly. I saw death regularly. For some reason, I can see that Romans

8:28 is real. I can see that even bad things work together for good. And so, I'm able to endure much of what I see them exposed to today. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

Faith is never placed in something you can see. It is something that you cannot see. I still have faith that things can get better. (PASTOR DANA)

David said, "I would have fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." So, for me faith is all we have- faith to believe that even though I don't understand what is going on in the world, I trust God. (PASTOR ROYAL)

Some participants described the pastoral experience as only seeing a small piece of the big plan God has for humankind. "We only see in part," says PASTOR ROYAL, "God lets you know you don't see the whole picture and that he has it under control." PASTOR TAYLOR explains that is why a pastor does not need to have all the answers, acknowledging that a minister can only see and prophesy in part. On the other hand, it does not inhibit a pastor from fully seeing that gun violence is a spiritual issue.

We are living under free will. Whatever we do is also under the free will that has been granted and given to us. The enemy also has their job to do, which is to stir up confusion and he comes to kill, steal, and destroy [people] so that they won't have life and they might have a more abundant life. So, although there is some bloodshed and there's things going on. There's still some light that she, some inspiration to people. (PASTOR DANA)

And then theologically makes you wonder if there is an evil spirit. I'm not well versed enough to be able to speak to that necessarily. But I can't say I haven't wondered whether there's something pre-eschatological happening in terms of some early signs of end

times. There does seem to be such a prevalence [of social ills] that it makes you wonder if there's a common or larger source of both human and inhuman. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

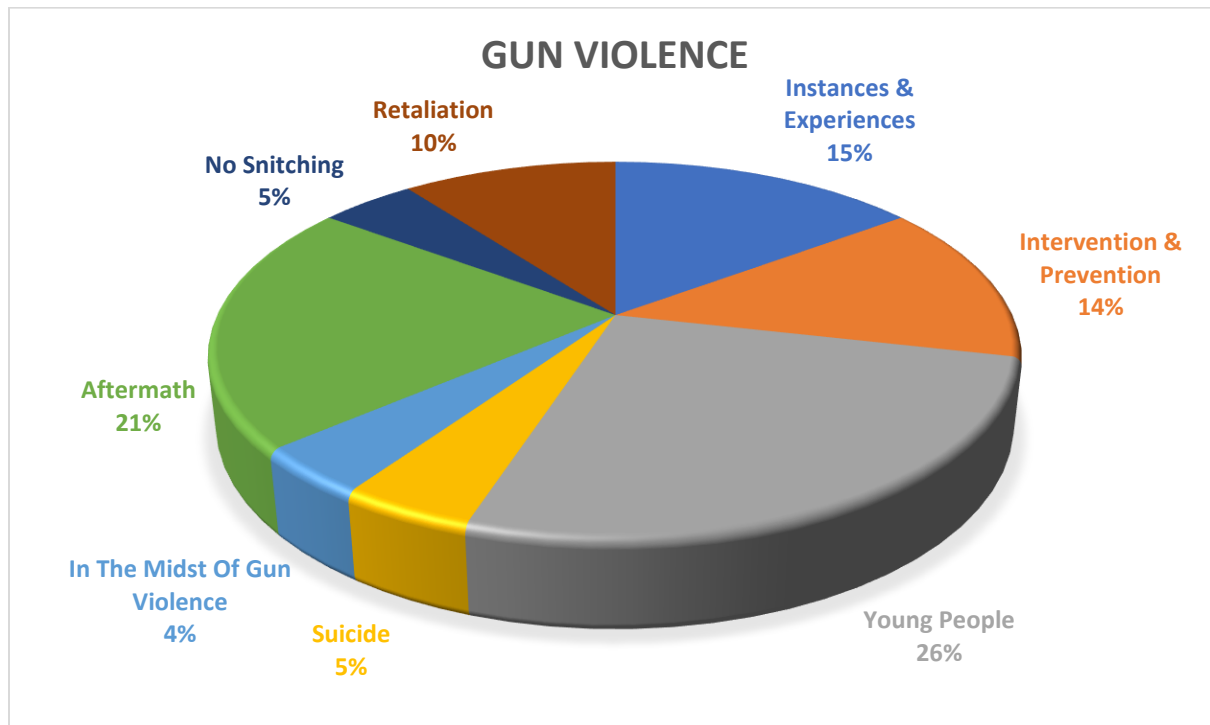
Not that many people would admit that sometimes hope feels like anger and sadness. More so angry at the wiles of the devil- the kinds that kill, steal, and destroy. So, we have to be angry. I'm angry at the enemy. He has interposed all of these different ways, getting people to reject God. His approach is that there's a change in all the millennial to kill, steal, and destroy. I'm hurt that people don't recognize that and they fall into the traps and the snares. (PASTOR HARPER)

Gun Violence

In the third theme, Gun Violence, co-researchers expressed that gun violence was prevalent to young people while recognizing that the behaviors and anxieties of young people were an outward expression of underlying problems. A few sub themes emerged relating to their perception of gun violence. These included Young People, Aftermath, and Intervention and Prevention. Participants were asked to describe their understanding of gun violence. They also shared experiences of leading a funeral for a shooting victim and named and detailed firsthand experiences with other things that emerge following a gun-related homicide.

Table 9

Understanding the Pastoral Experience of Gun Violence



Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of Gun Violence Themes

The pie chart shows the sub themes that tie into Gun Violence. Young People (26%) presented it as a significant concern. Aftermath (21%) took up a larger part of the pie in comparison to Intervention and Prevention (14%) and In the Midst of Gun Violence (4%). Fifteen percent of the pie represented pastoral experiences as well as secondhand accounts. Retaliation (10%), No Snitching (5%), and Suicide (5%) were lifted as themes tying into gun violence. In short, pastors play a critical role in the aftermath of gun violence although there is great interest in Intervention and Prevention. Although suicide only represents 5% of the pie, it should not be an overlooked issue. I indexed twenty accounts with the Suicide code during my analysis. Hence, suicide is a significant issue as it relates to gun violence.

Young People. All the participants have experience with young victims or the families of slain youth. PASTOR ROYAL shared that before she was a pastor and while she was still teaching, she had to comfort a family and eulogize a young victim of gun violence. She explained the experience as difficult. “There was shock and not-knowing what happened,” she said, “I felt powerless knowing that there's nothing I can do to take the pain away.” PASTOR SIDNEY shared, “Just two weeks ago, a member of my church, only twenty-one years old, was shot 10 times.” Many of the co-researchers experienced extreme closeness to the dynamic of young people and gun violence. “The worship leader of the church talks of his son experiencing an armed robbery while working for the Department of Transportation,” PASTOR CASSIDY says, “There’s a lot going on with that right now. He is looking for a new job- considering safer employment to change his jobs due to all the safety concerns.”

Many of the participants had experience with young people who were identified as the shooter. “The family was numb,” PASTOR DANA said, “it split them, like there were prayers with no eyes closed. They were shocked because the murder was not something they would expect the person to do. So, they were there but not there.” He further explained the heartbrokenness of the family, observing that it was hard on the grandmother, the shooter’s primary caregiver, to be questioned by the police about the child. Not only did most of the co-researchers know of young people that had served time for their involvement in a shooting or for a gun related charge, but many also had young people currently in jail for similar crimes. In response, PASTOR JODY shares, “We've had a professor here to talk about the systemic nature of gun violence to help our members better understand and connect the dots of what are the systemic and cultural things that contribute to the conditions for gun violence to happen.”

Aftermath. All the co-researchers acknowledged that the pastor plays a critical role in the aftermath, even if it meant simply being present and silent or with the family as they cried. Most of the participants explained that their aim is to keep the family in the present and the good. This means that they redirect the family when they are slipping into thoughts of “what if” or they are enjoying memories of joy and laughter with them. They do not ask questions about what happened or seek details and allow for moments where there is nothing to say. Some pastors experienced the impact of no snitching on a pastor’s present. PASTOR ROYAL says, “Just as many people that are happy and grateful that you are there, there’s just as many people that are not.” PASTOR CASSIDY had experienced the “closed mouths” of neighbors following a drive-by shooting that took place in front of their church and parsonage. Also, PASTOR DANA stated that he had to balance respect between drug dealers and officers. “I can’t have [the people on the corner] thinking I am a snitch, or they will be tight lipped,” he says. Most co-researchers demonstrated a commitment to gaining or maintaining respect from their neighbors, even those involved in criminal activity, as a means for getting through to them or at the very least forming connections that will facilitate community peace.

All participants experienced retaliation as a major part of the aftermath. “While [at the funeral],” says PASTOR DANA, I am paying attention to what everyone is talking about. There is always a police presence because sometimes, even at a funeral, I overhear them. And they are plotting and planning for revenge.” Hence, PASTOR TAYLOR explains, “My job is to sober people, to remind them that every action has a recourse and a consequence.” PASTOR HARPER describes the cycle of retribution as a need to get even and the continuation of the Hatfield’s and the McCoy’s. Many pastors, having seen the anger and the resentment of the family, have

experienced a sense of knowing that the family or peer of the victim was going to handle the incident in their own way, meaning with more gun violence.

Some co-researchers experienced the first row or the front pew during a funeral as a significant part of the aftermath. Accounts depicted how the positioning of the family and pastor impacted the way the pastor experienced his or her relationship with the pastor during the service, how they received or perceived the pain of the family, or how they felt based on what they saw and who they saw in the sanctuary while standing, sitting, and moving throughout the space during the service. Sounds were also significant parts of the funeral for some pastors, whether it was the music or the churchiness of the pastor's voice as a few members spoke about preaching style when participating in a non-Sunday service or engaging with a non-Sunday crowd. Yet, many shared the lasting impact of hearing a mother's cry.

"I cannot give over a mothers cry," says PASTOR DANA, "There's a mother's cry that I still can't get over. She is going to regret, for the rest of her life, calling the police on her son." Another participant shared that he may not be able to recognize a parent's face or remember their name, but he is certain he can identify them by their cry. (PASTOR CASSIDY) PASTOR HARPER is moved by his inability to comprehend a woman's cry or pain. "A mother hurts in a place where men just can't feel because that's their baby," he says, "they carried that baby from nine months. They nurtured it. They breastfed the baby. How much closer can you get? That kind of trauma and hurt from the mothers who weep, it doesn't go away. It doesn't stop."

Many participants explained that it is in the aftermath, when a pastor shows up to help at the scene, the hospital, the home, or to make a notification, that they are most aware that they lack training. One of the pastors explained that although never receiving pastoral training,

experience in the military as a chaplain where he performed death notices to families of soldiers killed in the line of duty that prepared him for this role in ministry. “Never did I imagine, I will still be doing death notices and navigating families through death, twenty years later,” PASTOR SIDNEY says. Some co-researchers stated belief that spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, bible study, meditation, being present with someone, etc. (PASTOR ROYAL), and their participation in such, prepare, guide, and sustain their work. PASTOR HARPER states, “The self-experience of being used by the Holy Spirit, in being obedient to the Holy Spirit, and trusting the Holy Spirit to speak for you so that you can bring hope to other people.” He adds, “I’m actually being used by the Holy Spirit at this moment (during this interview). God is actually speaking through me.”

Table 10

Aftermath Experiences as it Relates to Gun Violence

Pastoral Experiences	ROYAL	SIDNEY	CASSIDY	HARPER	DANA	TAYLOR	JODY
Gun related legal proceedings or cooperation with police	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
Concerned with shooting retaliation or participated in efforts to ensure retaliation prevention	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

Participated in a vigil, a rally or protest in response to gun violence	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Made a hospital visit for a shooting victim and their family	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Spent time with the family of the shooter	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of Pastoral Experiences with Gun Violence

This table represents the professional gun violence experiences of co-researchers. Some of the pastors (3) participated in gun related legal proceedings or cooperation with police. Most have been concerned with shooting retaliation or participated in the efforts to ensure retaliation prevention. All have participated in a vigil, a rally, or a protest in response to gun violence. Many made a hospital visit for a shooting victim and their family and most have experience spending time with the family member of the shooter.

Intervention and Prevention. Many participants expressed a desire to participate in the preventative work of gun violence although some acknowledged that they did not know where to begin. Some also shared that they had difficulty finding support, interest, or funding with regards

to prevention. PASTOR CASSIDY shared that he must turn people away from the feeding program due to overwhelming support. Yet, he cannot find people to participate in gun violence prevention activities. On the other hand, most co-researchers, including PASTOR CASSIDY, saw food programs as a preventative measure. PASTOR TAYLOR does not think that stopping shootings will resolve the problem of gun violence. Like many of the participants, he believes that gun violence is merely the result of a deep-rooted problem.

Many co-researchers equated gun violence with the lack of programs and support for military veterans, especially those who served during war time. Gun-related experiences with veterans were suicides and violent crimes. Some participants shared that intervention requires people to see what is happening and to respond to that rather than to walk by or go inside the church.

Someone dealing with trauma may kill someone. We have to take these people and help them find their purpose. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

I have someone, personally, that pulled the trigger. He was also a veteran. To the degree that all ministry is about relationships. The more and deeper relationships that we can foster deeper relationships, between folks on all sides of this issue, whether they're gun rights proponents, gun control proponents, victims of gun violence, perpetrators of gun violence, the better I believe we will be. (PASTOR JODY)

Intervention is engagement with those who are currently in the life- a gang banging, shooting, drug dealing, or engaging in activities that can lead to gun violence. Now Prevention work is the process of catching people that aren't in "the life" or "the game"

yet. These individuals have not committed a murder or shot someone yet. Therefore, the program, activity, effort is geared towards “stopping them before they go out and do it.

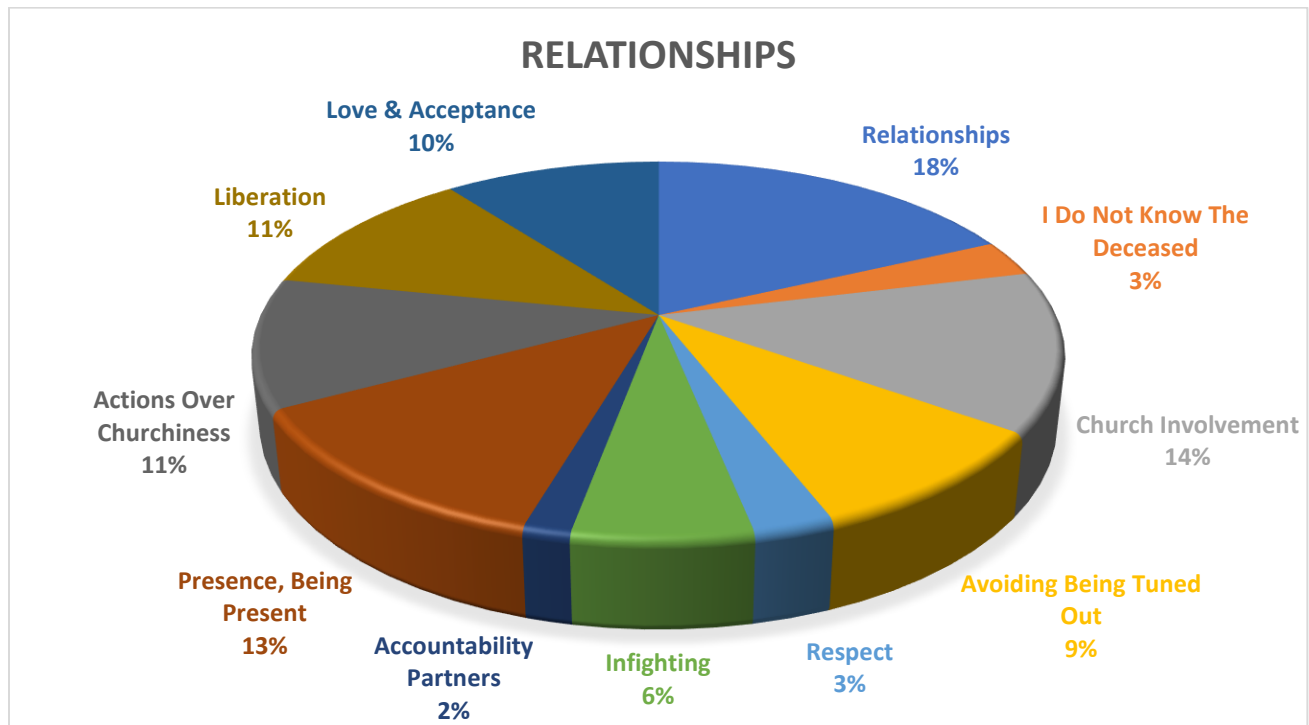
(PASTOR SIDNEY)

Relationship

In the fourth theme, Relationships, co-researchers expressed commitment to genuine, meaningful, and sustainable connections with community members, especially likely offenders, for the sake of ending gun violence. A few sub themes emerged relating to community connections. These included Relationships and Being Present, Church Involvement, and Actions over Churchiness. Participants were asked to describe roles they have played in the prevention, midst, and aftermath of gun violence. Participants also considered what it meant to preach the gospel in the face of death or gun violence.

Table 11

Understanding the Pastoral Experience as it Relates to Relationships



Note. Data collected by the author during the months of April and May 2022.

Textual Description of Table of Relationships Themes

The pie chart shows the sub themes that tie into Relationships. General details of pastoral relationships top the chart at 18%. Church Involvement (14%) and Presence or Being Present (13) tie for second. Both Liberation and Actions Over Evangelism take up 11% slices of the pie. Themes less than ten percent are Avoiding Being Tuned Out (9%), Infighting (6%), Respect (3%), Not knowing the deceased (3%), and Accountability Partners (2%). Relationships and Presence are just as important as how you show up- Avoid Being Tuned Out, Respect, etc. Relationships are not solely the pastor's responsibility, as both pastor relationships and church relationships presented the highest. Further, what you do when you show up also presented as important priorities as action and liberation took up more than 20% of the pie. Additionally,

infighting and lack of accountability can serve as barriers to forming meaningful and effective relationships.

Relationships and Being Present. All the participants experienced building community partnerships as a critical part of their work, whether it be with government leaders, local agencies and community groups, or community members and church leaders that are invested in the employing effective approaches to gun violence prevention.

We are in a phase of ministry where we are building relationships with people who are in the neighborhood; not people who are in the office at this particular time and won't be in the next term. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

Another way I help is by networking and letting people in the congregation know where they can engage in gun violence work, since I know of pastors who are actively involved. (PASTOR ROYAL)

All the co-researchers expressed an interest in going to get the people that are currently involved in gang life or activities that can lead to gun violence. PASTOR TAYLOR experienced this as being intentional about going out of the church building to meet people and realizing that when the pastor and the congregation does go, “we have to be friendly.” Recognizing that gun violence interruption can be dangerous, PASTOR HARPER explains, “The word of God tells us to be wise.” He is convinced that we can meet them at the need and meet them at the place where the pastor or church can get through the rougher outer shell of a person- their resistance and defiance.” PASTOR HARPER believes that this also takes love and intentionality.

The pandemic has kept us kind of isolated. In my role, I remind people that we are a part of the community and that we need to build bridges from inside out. (PASTOR ROYAL)

If people are not coming to church, you need to take the church to them. The gospel can be present in our outreach., building relationships. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

We need to go in with a level of compassion and love. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

All the co-researchers stressed and understood that how one presents themselves to someone dealing with trauma, living through a crisis, or experiencing a great need is important, especially if one is trying to help change that person's situation.

God's kingdom building work is through the life that we still have, trying to make [funeral] personal for each person as they walk out of there is something you can do moving forward. Building up the life God would have for us. (PASTOR JODY)

People remember how you showed up. You have to be present. There's a sweet spot in that engagement where they're now ready to talk. Whoever is there, in that crucial time when they are ready to open up, becomes an ally. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

I have members that live in Germantown but are not necessarily born in Germantown or drive into Germantown. They don't feel the same way as people that actively live in Germantown. So, we have to train the congregation to have compassion. (PASTOR TAYLOR)

I had a conversation with the church about violence and invited two members present to talk about their experiences with violence to make the church more aware of what's happening around us. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

Most co-researchers experienced a detachment when it came to engaging strangers met through the purpose of performing funerals. Many of the participants lead funerals frequently. "I do at least funerals every month," PASTOR DANA shared, "I don't even know the person, so I study the obituary." As a service performed by pastors, many of the participants shared that they have been requested to perform a funeral by unknown families, funeral homes, strangers on Facebook, people known in personal circles, or by members of the congregation.

There was a funeral I performed where I was familiar with the family but was not close with the family. It's still normal to do the pastor thing when you don't know these people. There's just no relations, no decorum, no history. It's the difference between starting a relationship (for a long-term engagement) versus managing the relationship and the moment (for the purposes of a funeral). (PASTOR TAYLOR)

It's like an act in a play; that's the best way I could describe a funeral. Act One was the church, Act Two is the funeral scene. And then Act Three, the people are departing the scene and the church goes back to its original form. (PASTOR ROYAL)

All the co-researchers experienced the pressure of putting away churchiness when engaging in gun violence work, especially with regards to funerals and vigils. Churchiness was not described as the diminishment of a pastoral or religious presence. It was described as over spiritualization to the point that it disregarded people's feelings or presented flamboyant

stereotypes of the traditional Sunday morning Black church. Also, “because the family is grieving, I do not go into deep theology or doctrine,” says PASTOR DANA. PASTOR HARPER also stresses that a pastor cannot say, “You are going to hell or to die, if you don’t come out of that life. You must meet them where they are,” he says, “and love them.”

I know that people do not always go to church. They hear the Bible, and they tune you out. So, I have to have a hook, a storyline, or something to incorporate the Word in a way that is palatable for them. (PASTOR ROYAL)

I don't think people look to the church for spiritual sustenance anymore. So, we have to wrestle with, “How does your faith play a role in the lives of people not associated with your church?” (PASTOR CASSIDY)

There's resistance from people [with regards to] receiving the gospel. (PASTOR HARPER)

I want to encourage them. I could shout but [they] are not used to that. If it's not a churchy crowd, I can't take them to church. The organist is there and ready, but I can't use him. (PASTOR DANA)

You don't want people to tune you out if you are too churchy. You have to be a good storyteller to bring people along so that they hear the Word, integrate it into their lives in a meaningful way. It's less about the performance or delivery- this is not Sunday! It's about invoking God's Spirit and together helping us find something, better leaving than they came. (PASTOR JODY)

Some co-researchers wrestled with how to make their congregations safe considering local gun violence and recent attacks on houses of worship while remaining a welcoming and inclusive space for worshippers and non-believers.

Church Involvement. All participants recognized church involvement started with the pastor and congregation's ability to engage others. This leans heavily on our attitudes regarding differences. "Maybe, we need to stop calling [young people] knuckleheads?" says PASTOR JODY. PASTOR HARPER says, "Young people speak their own language and use emojis." PASTOR ROYAL recognized that with a churchy group, you can use church expressions and cliches to settle the room. "If you use a churchy expression to try to light a room filled with young people or people who are not used to the church experience, it will fall flat" she says. PASTOR ROYAL shared that online worship however did create an opportunity to emotionally connect with all people, using pictures to have conversations about what the bible says and what is going on in our community and what we can do in response.

There was a consensus among all co-researchers that the pastor's responsibility is "to build church consciousness and be of one mind when preaching and praying about gun violence." (PASTOR CASSIDY) In part, PASTOR JODY says, this makes us recognize that we are all saying the same thing in diverse ways, often as taught by our theology. PASTOR CASSIDY would agree, explaining that faith is not tied to just Sunday morning and weekday bible study. "It needs to be relevant throughout the rest of the week." All of the co-researchers agreed that the church needed to be relevant throughout the way. PASTOR HARPER defined being relevant as "vulnerability when sharing our message, exclusively around Christ but making it a message of love, acceptance, and enough transformation." All participants perceived their

involvement in gun violence work as effective and beneficial when they made it a ministry of love. PASTOR DANA said, “When someone steps in our church, they feel loved, and we tell them that they just stepped into victory.” He and many participants agree that love is transforming. PASTOR DANA adds, “They say, ‘Everyone is so nice here.’ And when you leave, they say the same thing. We do this because we want them to leave with a smile on their face. We do not want them to leave the same way they came.”

Most of the co-researchers perceived, “People will tune you out and turn you off really quick.” (PASTOR DANA) Knowing that there are so many kinds of people they will meet or must minister to in a city, whether it be across faith traditions, economic status, etc., some participants said that to avoid being tuned out, the pastor should focus on being like Christ.

Love them- that was Christ's purpose. He met needs first so that he could present the gospel in a way that it will be received and not just beat over the head. (PASTOR HARPER)

Being like Christ means you are a liberator. I have to be like Christ- be where people are, empower the church to be a liberation church- engage people that are homeless, people who are struggling, and young who think that living this life is the only way for them to protect themselves. (PASTOR ROYAL)

Whatever you are doing, it should be of Christ, speaking life in the midst of death. It goes hand in hand with the gospel- being able to bring souls in, not forcing it down people's throats but in a more kinder, softer way depending on the audience that you are speaking with. (PASTOR DANA)

Actions over Churchiness. Due to personal experience in pastoral ministry, all co-researchers shared that it is a call to service.

Preaching the gospel is only 10% of my role as a pastor. We are in a new season. The church went through a season where the people who want to be preachers, teachers and to go all around the city preaching revivals. But there's a difference between a pastor and a preacher. Not everyone is called to be a pastor. (PASTOR SIDNEY)

I would be hesitant to say that preaching was the only role. I think that preaching the gospel is the primary role because the Gospel can be presented in so many different ways. St. Francis said, "I rather see a sermon than hear one." It's seeing love. (PASTOR CASSIDY)

The role of the pastor is to set himself as a servant. Jesus came to serve and not be served. We not only preach the gospel, but we serve the body of Christ and community in love. Just as God loved his only begotten son. (PASTOR DANA)

George Floyd's death created a pandemic that churches have to deal with. (PASTOR JODY)

All the co-researchers stressed that theology calls them to action in the moment. Activity can mean from simply showing up and the practice of being silent or receiving the tears of those impacted by gun violence. It can mean speaking up in a timely manner and calling on or out people to participate in the work. It can also bring unlikely groups of people together in pursuit of hope for a better tomorrow.

The church is one of the few places in society where folks that are diverse share- red state blue state, rich, poor, black, white. We share what we claim to be a deep sense of common identity as “a people of faith.” So, we are supposed to be helping people when there are so many things in our society seeking to rip us apart. This is the place where we’re supposed to be able to acknowledge things, recognize the hurt that they’ve caused and then dig deeper to reconcile and build deeper relationships among each other.

(PASTOR JODY)

It frustrates me when a pastor does the entire eulogy and never recognizes the people in the room. I struggle, too; “what can you say that doesn't minimize the events? Or when I say this- to have God overshadow everything- that sounds heretical. In other words, I always try to be mindful of being able to articulate God in a way that people can hear without minimizing their reality. So, what I try to do is share, “God has already done this. God will come back. In the meantime, what can we do to help one another in the meantime?” (PASTOR ROYAL)

I align myself with progressive, forward thinking, ideology, and politics. I'm a law enforcement officer that wants to end mass incarceration. I believe in reform. I advocate for prevention and intervention and for funding of community-based organizations. I believe in, certainly, reallocating resources to things that work. I do believe we need police and traditional law enforcement. I just don't think that the law enforcement budget should be larger than the school district budget. I don't believe that the law enforcement budget should be larger than what we're giving towards prevention. If by next year, the police department budget will be about \$1,000,000,000. I'm not mad at that, but we will

put a billion there. We need to find a billion to put into things that really work. Why?
Because law enforcement is an occupation. Being black in America is who I am. And
being a pastor is what I'm called to. (PASTOR DANA)

Most co-researchers shared that it also means bringing people together, despite differences, to bring about community change. Some stressed that timing is important. PASTOR SIDNEY explained that some people are satisfied with long-term strategies. He recognized that [responders] must do research and studies, as well as planning; it is important. Some of the participants shared that they know that structural and racial issues also need time to address, reform, and resolve. PASTOR SIDNEY agrees, stating we already know all that “but what do we do in the meantime? How do we treat the right-now? I am not hearing any answer on that.”

In summary, facing gun violence head on was a shared experienced. Pastors, congregations, and community members we able to come together to acknowledging the people who were involved and name the conditions that contributed to the tragedy. Experiences were described as depressing, heartbreaking, dangerous, and exhausting. Still, God was seen during the gun violence crisis, moving, and participating actively through pastors and other people. The felt presence of God and the faith, theology, and convictions of pastors was described as encouraging and sustaining. Experiences around how pastors deal with gun violence revolve around intentional ministry to young people, an art and etiquette for being present, and a willingness to pursue opportunities that would reduce gun violence.

Further, Key experiences outside of funerals were participating in vigils and providing support to the shooter or the family of the shooter. Pastors also experienced significant concerns

of retaliation. Yet, they found that there was a power to presence; it creates opportunities for pastors to intervene and interrupt violence, especially since they are given platforms of influence such as a vigil, the funeral, and more intimate spaces with the victim's family, to preach peace or confront retribution.

Summary

This chapter explicated the data provided by the co-researchers. The last step of the analysis is the general description which moves away from the participants' everyday perspectives and aims to discuss the themes that were implicit in all or most of the participants' descriptions of experiences (Peoples, 2021). In Chapter 5, I will present a general description of the lived experience of urban Black pastors amid gun violence.

CHAPTER FIVE: GENERAL DESCRIPTION

This study set out to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of urban African American pastors by answering to the following research questions: 1) What is the lived experience of an urban African American pastor serving Philadelphia during the surge of gun violence? and 2) How are Black Pastors Facing the Surge of Gun Violence in Philadelphia? This chapter presents a general description to unify the major phenomenological themes into a cohesive description of each participant's accounts. Semi-structured, face to face interviews and the Husserl-applied approach to phenomenological studies helped reveal the ways in which deeply distressing and complex instances of gun violence further complicate ministry experiences that clergy have already been described as unmanageable and stressful. It also illuminated joys, privileges, pains, and burdens that impede and deny pastors of their full personhood. Having examined what resilience looked like for urban Black Pastors, the description presents the frame of mind of clergy who are fighting "just to be obedient" to the call God has on their lives. This narrative of the findings was given to a new set of participants for feedback. Therefore, the chapter concludes with a report on the reliability of the study.

Answering the Research Questions

The following general description represents the lived experience of African American pastors serving urban communities and identifying as ministers with experience, interest, and attention to the surging gun violence in their community.

Part One: Overall Professional Experience

The urban African American pastor must live up to various expectations. There is an understood imperative that ministry efforts be unique to the city and particular to the neighborhood that the pastor serves. There is also pressure to operate out of the expectations of community members and leaders. Often, these expectations are based on what the community perceives of the Black Church and its leaders. Community expectations can be a taxing obligation as it impacts a pastor's sense of belonging and can set an unrealistic or overwhelming confidence in the pastor or the church. The foremost duty of the pastor is to their church which has its own distinct set of priorities based on what the congregation wants to see done. Every church establishes and dictates general pastoral functions through a clergy job description.

Embracing the city's culture is also necessary; urban pastors learn this early in ministry. He or she enacts awareness of the informal agreement to be a pastor of the people and the people's traditions, constructs, and institutions. Without question, this means that they are also the pastor of Football Sundays. On Sunday, February 4, 2018, the Philadelphia Eagles played the New England Patriots in Super Bowl LII. The Philadelphia area pastor would have been remiss to ignore the divine connection between the date's lectionary text and the scheduled game. The Old Testament reading for the day was Isaiah 40:31: *But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.* After years of patience and faithful waiting, Philadelphia—not merely a team, but the entire city—was back in the Super Bowl. There was not a church sign in the Delaware Valley that didn't read "Fly Eagles Fly."

It is fair to assume that every Sunday church experience felt the same through liturgy and service order. Philadelphians sang victory hymns. Ordinary Time for the Church (per the

Liturgical Calendar) and this extraordinary “Game Time” for the city had everything in the sanctuary from the altar to congregant attire fashioned in green. Also, a significant part of the congregation’s praise and the pastor’s message embodied the faith that the people of Philadelphia would mount up with wings like eagles—for God was going to deliver a win for them that day. Somehow, when a pastor’s sermon weaves in the parishioner’s love for their city and the game, it is cathartic and re-energizing. It brings practicality to a faith that assures the people that “we are more than conquerors” and that God is on the underdog’s side. In 2018, the Philadelphia Eagles did win the Super Bowl. Pastors experienced this victory as an even greater win for the city’s people because of community solidarity. Even the 2023 Super Bowl LVII loss to the Kansas City Chiefs could be celebrated because it forged community comradery. Undoubtedly, Philadelphians bleed green; passionately, they pledge allegiance and unwavering support to their teams, and the pastor’s prophetic voice is not absent from that.

Pastors conform to the duty of playing an integral role in strengthening community bonds and making visible, for people, all the miraculous wonders that God can do when the community rallies together around a common good. Even the most conservative pastors would not negatively count uplifting sports from the pulpit as being a *part of the world*. Rather, it is the pastor’s way of letting people know, “I see you, and you are a part of mine.” Therefore, after spending time in service with their Sunday morning worship congregation, a pastor will visit their other congregation—those gathered outside the bar, the barber shop, a bus stop, or the hangout spot. They are still the pastor of the folks at these hang-out spots and institutions, even if they do not attend Sunday service. The pastor considers it a duty to go to where these people are gathered, even if it means simply honking the car horn as he or she drives by.

When the pastor attempts to *slip into* the back of a meeting room to observe what is taking place, they will respond to the invitation, “And we have a pastor here tonight.” It can be a town watch meeting, a vigil, or a ward and committee meeting; the pastor knows that such a phrase serves as an indirect demand for them to come up and speak. Pastors accept that their very presence brings comfort, affirmation, unity, and validation to any space and they contribute accordingly. Pastors have equal access to traditional communication and social media outlets as every other professional. However, the pastor has grown to understand that the most beneficial tool for building solidarity among his neighbors is use of the outdoor street sign as a means to communicate and speak to the pressing things they care about. For instance, a sign might read, *Praying for Peace Everywhere. You are loved! Hot food & Warm blankets here.* Their actions are not solely felt as obligatory; it is consequential. The pastor can physiologically feel and sense the urgency and loneliness of being the desperately needed voice. They take up the mantle of speaking into the lives of the people who are learning and working in some of the most underserved places within the city, county, state, region, and country. Therefore, they accept and carry the burden of letting people know they see, care, and “will fight for you” because America (and the rest of the world) is blind and silent.

The pastor suffers the disappointment of witnessing how government officials—from the highest level of management down to the local leaders that their parishioners and other community constituents have elected—fail to address community conditions that overwhelm people with violence, poverty, and mortality. Pastors also feel the history (which is experienced mentally as an honor and a burden) of being the chief leader of a church that their neighbors turn to when good help does not come from leaders with the official resources and capacity to address

the community's concerns. There are also physiological sensations, exasperating the loneliness pastors associate with providing community care. Such feelings can be described as shoulder pain, a pressing down feeling from the mental weight of civic responsibility, and emotional overwhelm stemming from the pastor's thoughts that these responsibilities and other imposed obligation rests solely on their shoulders. The pastor experiences frustration, knowing that although other community leaders should share in the work of helping, healing, uplifting, and restoring the community, this kind of work has been so closely knit to the early faith traditions of Black churches. The burden of provision of community care is inseparable from standard ministerial duties as pastors have *always done it this way*. Hence, there are experiences of grief and resentment as they toil with the responsibility of a minister's call to urban communities and the frustration of not enough pastors (or community leaders) taking up this work.

For a pastor to provide care to the people in their community, he or she must be willing to do it the Philly way. This means the pastor must adapt to the Philly Mentality, living up to the Christian standard of meeting people where they are. Despite the crime and neighborhood conditions, this unique mindset particular to Philadelphia strengthens the city's sense of community. It is also an acceptance of all the good and evil the city has to offer. This mindset says, "it's us— *all of us*—against all odds and everyone else." The Philly mindset enacts language that signals to other Philadelphians who else is a part of the city. A pastor new to the town will learn that although the word "jawn" can define just about everything, it still takes practice to place the word within a sentence confidently and correctly. On the other hand, the phrase "Let's go, Eagles" can mean anything from 'thank you' to 'have a nice day' or 'forget

you’ and “get out my face.” When outside their standard professional work setting, pastors have found the phrase, “Go Eagles,” to be as formal of a greeting as a handshake.

Pastors have experienced the Philly Mentality as a ministry preservation tactic; its adaptation can assist with relevancy and personal safety. Philadelphia native Kobe Bryant’s unstoppable mamba mentality—that is the Philly mindset; he took it with him to Los Angeles. The mindset made him a champion, and then he branded it. And pastors have witnessed how this fearless and persevering Philly mentality makes it easier for residents to survive, cope, and thrive in a unique urban environment such as this. When someone has a grievance about the city, the response, “That’s just Philly,” reminds them to accept the issue and let it go. Even if people do not condone every impulse or behavior, they maintain a cultural understanding that Philadelphians are the way they are because of how Philadelphia is. Not even a pastor can separate this outlook from their work if they want to be a practical part of the community. Still, one thing is for sure, a pastor either has the Philly thing down, or he or she does not.

At the very least, the Philly mentality requires pastoral allyship. Understanding the differences in people’s living conditions and treatment compared to other areas of Pennsylvania drives a genuine sense of the pastor’s responsibility to the neighborhood they serve. Without adapting to the Philadelphia mentality, the pastor could not trust their gut and be attuned to the sense of imminent and nearby danger. Nor will they be sensitive or intimately connected to the needs of the people. Pastors are also subject to the city’s unique demands for flexibility. Not one section of this city is like the other. The pastor needs to be able to navigate this, especially when crossing territories and boundaries. This can be intimidating and frightening for Black Pastors already acclimated with the city, as well. Philadelphians are always on guard, knowing precisely

where people are coming from, and assuming what outsiders are coming for based on how they walk or talk. Therefore, coming correct—doing things respectfully and in the right way the first time—is a relational street code that even clergy must adhere to.

The pastor must synchronize their trust in the Spirit and trust of their gut, which can be challenging, especially when pressured with having only one chance to make a connection right. It is difficult for the pastor to reach people he or she desires to help if the church or previous leaders have already been written off. Besides, when would someone learn to grant second chances when they cannot afford to make mistakes? Meeting people where they are physically and mentally has required pastoral courage and a fair balance between their convictions and compassion. Despite the pastor's Christian understanding of grace, the pastor has to accept and understand that this city can be unforgiving. He or she is serving people who are being chronically abused in every way possible—economically, socially, emotionally, and financially. The people carry a mindset that has been conditioned by dire living conditions neglected by city leadership. Consequently, the community's most vulnerable members are repeatedly subjected to oppression, depression, and dispossession. The result of prolonged neglect and undue community-wide trauma has motivated the people to defend themselves. Yet, they are not fighting against unjust laws and marginalization; they are fighting against each other.

The pastor cannot be ignorant of the community conditions that have created this sensitivity among residents which has now led to the escalation of gun violence and increased neighborhood killings. They also share in the Black experience of being a part of neighborhoods whose zip codes are treated like the footstool of higher-performing urban communities. They have witnessed racial disparity in education, poverty, and unemployment. Further, community

concerns regarding access to healthcare, support for underperforming schools, policies that reduce pipelines to mass incarceration, and plans to reduce violent crime and assure overall public safety remain ongoing and unresolved issues. The growing gloom within schools and around playgrounds due to unsolved crimes of Black school-aged students is impacting the community's morale and self-esteem, especially when it seems that the deaths of white college students that are not even native to the area are taken up as the priority. There is no peace or safety within the home as family systems consist of violence, brokenness, and dysfunction. As for the economy, people live within a system where no one, not even some pastors, can afford or access their medication, while just about everyone has affordable access to guns. The experience for the pastor is unbelievable.

Yet, this the shared reality: Children are robbed of their innocence and friendliness before they reach school age. City youth are a part of education systems where it is not until they are placed within a detention center setting that they gain, possibly for the first time in their life, a relationship with an adult who shows genuine interest in their uplift and success. Then there is a global pandemic to which city officials closed up their offices, turning a blind eye on their duties to assure sufficient provision for already-impoverished communities. Inevitably, pastors have witnessed firsthand how these situations have led to a plethora of skyrocketing needs that people with limited resources, opportunities, and means for provision had to figure out how to address for themselves. So, when it comes to issues of gun violence and public safety, it is heartbreaking. However, what makes the experience most revolting and physically nauseating for the pastor is that they cannot wrap their head around the senseless violence but, simultaneously, and because of the community conditions, they understand.

There is an enthusiastic sense of urgency to address the escalating community needs, and the pastor believes that the Church is needed now more than ever. However, what is most frustrating is the pressure of church flight. Similarly, to Philadelphia's White Exodus, congregations are proposing they leave the community. Members want to relocate the church's ministries and missions and replant its resources and programs in some place that they deem better or, at the very least, feels much safer. When it looks like everyone is turning away from the responsibility of supporting the city, the pastor experiences it as a turning-in. It feels like a crashing down as the sole weight of the blame is caving in, *and likely on them*. Because of the pastor's keen sense of call, they doubt they could leave the area if they wanted to. But let's make this clear, the pastor doesn't want to because God has put the desire in their heart to be there and to love the people. So, he or she feels torn between the call to the congregation and the call to the church location which are seemingly in two different places.

When it seems not everyone loves people the way the pastor loves them, it makes pastoring a physically and emotionally demanding role. Nothing tires the pastor more than feeling like their hopes for the city are unsupported. The fatigue comes from disappointment and discouragement. *Do they see what is going on? Don't they care that people are dying? Aren't they aware of how much these people need help?* The pastor often asks these questions of God, as well, making it his or her responsibility to encourage the church to prioritize the needs and conditions of the community. Although, if they could be honest, sometimes, the pastor resents having to encourage church people to do the right thing. The pastor settles for the insular priorities of the congregation, even allowing their behavior to be described as out of touch. Yet,

the pastor knows what it truly is. The congregation is scared to go outside and work within the community.

Due to growing safety concerns, congregations must reconsider how they evangelize or open their doors for community programming. The congregants do not know how to resolve their own issues of urban trauma, let alone engage with people outside of the church that have perpetrated or fallen victim to the increasing community violence. The pastor has found that even the most confident believers are living in fear, distressed by the reality that anything from stepping on someone's shoes to unknowingly looking at a stranger in the wrong way can lead to a shooting. Although it may seem more convenient for the congregation to close its doors and sing a little louder over the cries of the community members, the pastor obligates himself or herself to ensuring that vulnerable people are not left to fend for themselves. Hence, the pastor must be the one who puts the congregation on the tasks of community relations.

Community involvement is a pillar of urban pastoral ministry. Even the pastor feels quite successful and progressive when building relationships through community initiatives. Participating in protests and supporting community initiatives, collaborating with other faith leaders and city activists, opening up their church for a community meeting, praying over the area, and getting to know the young people—these activities are encouraging and purpose fulfilling to the pastor. Whereas the pastor's proactivity and efforts lead to change for the betterment of the community, it is also self-sustaining. This area of ministry (outreach) provides instant gratification for the pastor; he or she gets to experience how their presence and efforts help others in real-time. Even if it is a quick "thank you" or seeing for himself or herself the

people walking away with a smile, the pastor is content with such moments when they can share in the efforts that are making a difference in people's world.

The pastor proudly embraces the beauty of their city—the rich history and the breathtaking architecture, parks, and recreational spaces. He or she experiences God within the diversity and vibrancy of community life, which is often busy due to traffic in and out of the corner stores and the up-and-down passage along the storefront businesses. Nearby, there are bustling sounds of young life as students travel to and from various educational centers and institutions, accommodating every academic level. The amount of parking on the street follows the constant and routine pattern of scheduled activities hosted by the houses of worship on the block or not too far away. However, the area they serve is primarily residential. So, the pastor admits they feel a self-imposed pressure to experience the community on a more personal level, requiring themselves to be more social and spend more time outside the building, engaging with their neighbors. Per the internalized expectation, the pastor often experiences guilt and bashfulness when acknowledging he or she does not know their neighbors *as much as they should*.

The pastor serves various groups of people from all levels of society, ethnic backgrounds, and social classes as they mix in one area. They are actively partnering with each of the groups for the sake of helping everyone live meaningful lives. Therefore, community relations in urban areas bring a pastor into a relationship with the medical student who will only be around for a few months and the long-term renter adjusting to life after drug recovery. Both kinds of people live within their part of town. The existence of such a diverse blend can be best demonstrated by the Papi store and the vegan and gluten-free shake shack that take up commercial spaces on the

same street. Although the pastor is a part of this feel-good image of co-existence, there is a lingering sense of division. Everyone in the community knows what is happening; they are watching as new and new kinds of people move in. Even if the pastor tries to smooth things over to assure community members that this is for their benefit and is about bettering the community, they still must respond to the people's concern about the lack of communication with new kinds of community residents. *If your motive is to be a part of an inclusive community, "why don't you talk to me?"*

The pastor can find themselves mentally torn between the benefit of redevelopment, the burden of urban removal, and their expected role throughout these community changes. He or she senses the community's distance and distrust in the return of businesses and capital to the community after a long lapse in economic development in the area. They also experience their own distance and distrust, and it is accompanied by an impulse to respond (reach out to the city), especially when neighbors feel powerless against the changes and actions that are reducing the sense of belonging of long-term residents. The pastor's initial response may be to get acquainted with the changes and get a feel for the new people and things happening in the community. Still, there's hesitation due to the uncertainty of motives behind rapid community changes spearheaded by city leadership, even when the changes come with a promise to bring about something good. There's even ambiguity regarding how the pastor feels about the White businesses (namely, any business owned by and targeting people from outside of the area or of a higher economic status) that are popping up in the Black parts of their town. The pastor wrestles privately, discerning if what is happening is a justice issue.

The pastor is not simply dealing with people in the community. He is dealing with people who are dealing with community dynamics. A pastor serving a community that is dealing with gentrification may endure some of the following thoughts that make him feel bound and powerless:

A pastor is supposed to welcome everyone. A pastor is supposed to push back against injustice. How will I speak on something when my congregation or own household does it too? A pastor is supposed to love everybody. A pastor is supposed to make everything tolerable and ok. Be careful as a Black person not to become overstimulated and come off as aggressive. You have a reputation for your God and church to maintain, so you must appear and act a certain way.

The pastor must navigate how to be inclusive and welcoming to incoming people and businesses while also lifting the sin of gentrification and the need to resolve the distance between the privileged and the poor, college students and permanent residents, new residents, and long-term residents, etc. He or she is anxious about how to do so without sounding angry while also struggling with insecurity and feelings of hypocrisy if they have yet to acknowledge the distance between their congregants who worship in the community once a week and the people who live in the community every day. These exhausting and intrusive thoughts are often learned and internalized through an upbringing in the Black church or community.

The pastor's community relationships and involvement are a function of his own convictions and core beliefs. Nevertheless, the pastor quickly learns to be ready to roll with or respond to the many ways the community continues to change, particularly regarding gentrification and redevelopment. The urban pastor yearns for transformation. He or she deals

with the community's shifts in morals and values, noting that these changes have also contributed to significant community turnouts. The pastor knows that gentrification is the easy path to allow the city and church to abdicate their responsibility to speak into the lives of people in the community. However, the pastor feels divinely called to serve the community differently and, therefore, champions a vision to restore the city and liberate the people from the systems that have led to carnage and oppression.

On the other hand, it can be infuriating when the pastor thinks that community do not realize they have a critical role to play in resolving the issue. He or she is content in their judgments, given the extent the church is relied upon or how pastors are censored.

Significant Reliance on the Church. Even if the neighborhood church is not where community members receive spiritual sustenance, they rely on the church extensively to provide for their financial and material needs. If it is one thing that people get right about the church, it is that it has a benevolence fund. The congregants may express concern about the over-dependence of community members or a consistent few. Still, the pastor encourages the congregation to do good and sees it as a duty to inspire generosity. Even if the pastor appears fine and is known for his scriptural mantra about cheerful giving or it being better to give than to receive, he or she feels the relational toll of a one-sided “take”: *I am from this town. I grew up on the same block and with the same community assistance. Does my collar make them think I am exempt, far removed, or free of experiences of the pain experienced by the community? I take the same steps past the memorials of slain peers or blood on the curb and the bullet holes in doors or walls that haven't yet been plastered over as you do. I've held onto the same fear that retaliation was*

lurking and the unknowing of where the next bullet would come from. It's repetitive. It's chronic. It's not ok, and I am not ok.

The urban Black pastor might feel abandoned when people behave as though church members and leaders are incapable of understanding the community's pain, especially when they feel the same pain as intimately as others do. They can be subtly indignant at the audacity of a community member trying to hustle or get over on them because the member assumes the pastor is not hip to the city's games. They are further frustrated by an inability to meet the community where it is genuinely because they are generally, and often solely regarded as the helper in a helping relationship.

Pastoral and Church Censorship. Although the pastor is confident that change takes community cooperation and not just church involvement and government intervention, he or she understands that they have to tread lightly with reproach. They know it does not take much to offend people. It is frustrating to have so many platforms available to use and not have the freedom to use them in the way a prophet or preacher needs to. Due to a current culture that chooses to ostracize leaders for presenting unfavorable content, the pastor has to impose self-censorship, speaking only to the community's strengths or speaking out against external community threats. The invitation to march and speak out at a protest in response to the ever so often murder of an African American by a white person, a cop, or someone outside of the Black community can be mind-boggling to a pastor because *where is the outrage or the motivation to address the deep-rooted and internal issues that have caused Black people to kill one another every day?*

Although the pastor wants to confront the crowd or those gathered, he or she recognizes that the people are already hurting, simply from everyday life. So, when a tragedy provides an opportunity for a pastor to speak, it does not always feel appropriate to use the time to confront. The pastor is compelled to share and spread the love that is missing from the present situation. So, instead the pastor seizes the opportunity to uplift and remind people of who they are. Despite a felt urgency that drives a more direct and aggressive approach to community change, the pastor accepts, in the same sense, that love is needed to bring about change. He or she holds on to a faith that promises that love makes people better. It meets people where they are and gets them to a place where they can share in the responsibility of the vision of a better community and way of life.

The pastor is aware of the increase in insensitivity and non-receptiveness to the spiritual covering of the church. General misconceptions are also attributed to Black churches. Black congregations are associated with the cynicism of evangelicalism, and the pastor risks being grouped among missional groups that prioritize proselytizing over addressing life-threatening problems. To shed the cynicism, the pastor lets their efforts speak. They work through social challenges by ensuring the community that they will not resign their duties or sit still through all the harmful and hurtful things that are happening. The pastor is instrumental in leading church initiatives that supplement other forms of community aid. The pastor cautions responses that could be misunderstood as judgments; they demonstrate the humility of the pastor—not having the answers but genuinely partnering with the people in the community to advocate for change. They also jumpstart conversations that bring about justice, and to create access to opportunities, mentorship, and quality healthcare.

The pastor will always speak about hopefulness, even amid helpless situations. For instance, a pastor cannot be sure if they have connected with someone beneficially or effectively if they have not figured out how to see eye to eye or share an understanding of the person's values, needs, and experiences. When the pastor is told, "you just don't understand," the inadequacy that follows is shared between the pastor and the community member. The community member feels annoyed in his or her attempts to express themselves adequately and betrayed by the expectation that the pastor should understand; however, they are convinced the pastor does not. The claim that a pastor does not understand is also shaming, challenging the pastor's significance, capability, and intelligence. Receiving these words, the pastor is dismayed, fully aware that the person is still crying out for help. The person has a need that the pastor has not yet been authorized to come near. Nevertheless, the pastor still must push for unity and accountability despite the wedges of misconception and misunderstanding. The experience can be sad and heartbreaking.

The pastor accepts a call to hurt for others. Per the scripture that reminds believers that "people hated Jesus," they understand that they would be hurt by others, too. However, the pastor carries his or her own set of hurts. The pastor may have unresolved trauma. They are also experiencing community trauma; this makes them susceptible to depression, anxiety, and issues that can affect their physical health. Personal struggles and health issues impact a pastor's relationships with others. These struggles may go unnoticed or be defined by terms like "compassion fatigue" and "quiet quitting." Such terms mask the diagnosis of mental health, prioritize the demanding profession over the wellbeing of the pastor, further feelings of inferiority for lack of motivation, and shame the pastor's decisions to set up appropriate

boundaries. Even with a pastoral support team or a pastor relations committee, the pastor finds himself insufficiently supported. Sacrificing their health, fearing vulnerability, prioritizing others—yet the pastor is provided with very little help or relief from within their congregation. Time and space for the pastor to enjoy a Sabbath's rest or have an uninterrupted break is rare, given the community's or congregation's demands. No breaks and a regular on-call schedule are a norm. In the back of a pastor's mind, they worry, "Who will do it if I do not do it? Who will be there if I am not there?" Hence, pastors can experience restlessness, an inability to unplug, and anxiousness regarding their absence.

The pastor is quite familiar with the Black Church code that entices ministry leaders never to let the congregation (or anyone else) see them sweat. They must project strength. There's pressure to conceal emotions as they have witnessed or even perpetuated the shame associated with being unable to keep things together. The pastor bears the heaviness of bravely facing even the most difficult circumstances. While the pastor may feel as though he or she is on the outside of a demanding situation looking in, they understand that it is not that they do not belong. Pastors are welcomed in community space, and it would not be argued that they do not belong there, especially during a time of crisis. However, the sense of belonging relates more so to how the pastor fits into the situation. It is always the pastor's job to be of a sound and sober mind, reflecting a faith—that he or she may not have at that moment—for others. People want them there to make things better. So silently, the pastor carries the burden and angst for the dreadful things in their city to work together for good, as well as the emptiness associated with being unable to unsee and unhear what they have witnessed or is privy to because they are the pastor.

While the urban Black pastor considers it an honor and a privilege to serve the community, they must juggle urban requirements, professional standards, community requests, and congregational demands along with the burdens that come with all of those responsibilities. They are motivated to engage in ongoing activities, accepting them as a part of their distinct call to bring community transformation. However, such actions may be outside of their standard job description or only a tiny part of their ministry through the church. They must focus on the weekday needs of both the people in the congregation and the community. The pastor is questioning himself (or herself) and battling depression and other health issues. They are allowing themselves to be pulled in various directions to meet competing expectations. Still, the pastor must prioritize Sunday morning service, Bible studies, church administration, and other ecclesial duties.

Doing it all limits the pastor's opportunities to truly decompress, find rest, or acknowledge and work through the emotions and grievances that come along with pastoral ministry. With many things that must be handled by the pastor or go through the pastor, they find it challenging to feel they are doing enough for the community and accomplishing what they are obligated to do as a church employee. Urban ministry is an impossible and unrealistically complex profession. With pastors already dealing with everyday injustices and devastating community norms, the city's surge of gun violence creates another issue for the pastor to tend to, increasing the burden of an already overwhelming and burdensome call.

Part Two: Facing Gun Violence

This part offers deeper insight into the pastoral response to gun violence, highlighting thoughts, emotions, and religious experiences not limited to compulsion,

experiences with young people, officiating funerals, and living out their calling. The description of a pastors' experience when addressing gun violence in their community reveals the dark sides of their ministry. It heavily emphasizes the parts or responsibilities of ministry that are unpleasant and harmful yet are not often spoken or given attention.

I Don't Even Know Where to Begin. "I do not even know where to begin?" is not an uncommon admission for the urban African American pastor addressing gun violence within his community. This perplexed mindset embodies overwhelming dismay, insecurity, and community concern. Regular killings compel the pastor to act immediately. The heart is burdened, and he or she feels a deep, persistent tugging down from the place of his spiritual calling. The sensation may appear to be of nausea. However, the unsettled feeling in the pastor's stomach and the queasiness that reverberates up to his or her head are the start of a spiritual fervor stirring up inside of the him or her. Although this is a physiological experience, the pastors discern this to be a spiritual unction. It is the prophetic voice that is trying to break through—passionately, enterprising, and valiantly. The pastor cannot describe this compulsion to respond to the threat of violence looming over the city, nor can they deny it.

This prophetic voice will arise when the pastor takes the bold step toward the family member of a victim after hearing and observing the family member discuss intentions for retaliation. Even if the words, "I know what you are planning to do; You don't want to do this," comes out in a tremble, the pastor's audacity to intervene is somewhat revered. During a eulogy well attended by seemingly non-churched people, the pastor is determined not to be churchy or get excited and shout. Still, phrases such as "It is time for a change" or "This is not the answer" come bursting out, and these mediations of the pastor's heart resonate long after in the minds of

the mourners like a hopeful campaign. When the pastor says, “We have had enough,” this unanticipated and indignant admission is the assertion of the pastor’s authority in secular spaces and among tri-sector leaders; it’s their firm and brazen declaration of human worth and intentional transformation which leads to the consideration of policies, programs, and funding that keeps their community safe.

Even in the face of gun violence, God has proven to the pastor, through these instances, that He will give the pastor the words to say and the protection to go along with it. Still, like many pastors, he or she will feel guilty and disappointed, as though they are not living up to the expectations of their call. If they believe that are not taking as many practical and progressive steps towards alleviating or ending gun violence as “they should.” The pastor is often burdened by this idea that they are supposed to do things accordingly, by the book, to a certain degree and number, as it should be, or per the rule or law of the priesthood. He or she feels the invisible microscopes of the community, the congregation, and even their pastoral peers put them under. It was unintentionally internalized, and now the pastor is conscious of every movement, reflecting on every public action and decision and inadvertently psyching themselves out, undoubting that they may be doing something wrong.

Uncertainty is the primary cause of inactivity. It can be challenging for the pastor, who is compelled to act, to garner the capacity to do so when they are in their own head, telling themselves that they are not only incorrect but also in over their head. When the pastor does not know where or how to position himself or herself in response to gun violence, they can grow exhausted by the overwhelming thoughts of what they have personally determined it would take to respond effectively and sufficiently to community crisis. Gun violence is a community ill that

keeps the pastor up at night. Often, the pastor takes it to the Lord in prayer. On other nights, they are up alone, unable to move past brainstorming into action. From the beginning, the pastor takes on the issue as their own. Although they may say they need help, it is in the late-night hours, that the pastor unknowingly attempts to carry out tasks independently.

So, alone, the pastor makes plans and wrestles with the opportunities and the possibilities. The pastor grieves and is refilled with the worry of past incidents and imminent threats. He or she contemplates the unbelievable, the uncontrollable, and the seemingly impassable alone. The pastor is without coregulation. The pastor is without comradery. Aloneness is a bad habit and a non-efficient means for them to cope. Trauma, overwhelm, and anxiety are paralyzing, yet the pastor is pressured to measure up to a ministerial mantle—What will you *do about all these shootings? Must your church host a safe haven or mentorship program for young boys? Why weren't you at the rally in front of city hall?* Although these overwhelming demands are mounting and crushing, the pastor's shame for not meeting a by-the-book's expectation causes them to neglect the trauma and anxiety that results in inactivity. He or she may not be aware that their immobile or slow-to-start responses to gun violence are not about their willingness or the effectiveness of their efforts. It is about their community—judging and dictating per unspoken rules or building a relationship with the pastor, discerning alongside them, and supporting the actions that allow them to accomplish assignments according to their call.

The pastor may consider gun violence to be his or her spiritual giant. Due to the surety of their call, they know that compared to the violence, they are to appear small and ill-prepared. Although they have faith that God supplies victories in unlikely manners, they pastor may avoid forward progression and become a drifter between escapism and unrealistic optimism (which is a

hinderance to any demonstrable hope in miracles). The pastor may encourage the congregation to use prayer as the only defense, implying the church's inactivity allows them to witness what the Lord will do. Or the pastor may neglect any social concern and uphold proselytizing as the only solution to righting community wrongs. There is no room for both social action and gospel preaching. Therefore, while either pastor may have a strong sense of call regarding gun violence, their compulsion to act lacks social concern.

On the other hand, the pastor may be a champion for community action yet, discouraged in their pursuit to address gun violence at the community level and through neighbor engagement. How can the pastor equip and prepare their congregation to join them in gun-related ministry if they, too, need equipping and training in this area of ministry? The pastor hesitates because he or she knows they will be expected to lead and is unsure how to. The pastor recognizes gun violence as a tentacle of other overwhelming community ills. They passionately believe these are spiritual and systemic issues that can be addressed through the church. So, where does the pastor start—advocating for community causes? Lifting his or her prophetic voice a little louder and much broader? Engaging in activities that interrupt and prevent gun violence? Of all the places the pastor could be, with urgency, they want to figure out how to stop death in its tracks.

The most glaring issue is gun violence's nature to breed itself; the pastor has witnessed the ability of gun violence to produce more deaths from retaliation to suicide, within his neighborhood. Ultimately, each death has ended the surviving family member or peer's life as they know it. The pastor lives a lifestyle that is privy to watching people that are dying inside; emotionally, when they cannot overcome their grief. He or she journeys with mothers, fathers,

and grandparents dying physically—vital organs become weak and compromised by grief—because of the physiological impacts of a broken heart. The pastor receives their confessions:

I don't think I can go on like this. Sometimes, I think I could just kill myself.

These cops ain't going to do nothing about this! We are going to handle it.

I regret it every day, Pastor; we should have never called the cops on my son.

The killer is still out there. I thought they were his friends, and no one is saying anything.

The pastor becomes a big-picture witness. As someone who receives the first death notice and is employed to funeralize the subsequent victim, he or she is often present when survivors or mourners need to verbally exert their impulses or are ready to talk. Therefore, the pastor receives information—from those who survived the shooting, those who witnessed the shooting, and those who walked past or through the scene during the aftermath—that allows him or her to make connections between the violence that is happening in their city. While this information will aid his pursuits to address gun violence as a spiritual and systemic issue, the pastor is now concerned with the revealed health issue. Mortality is increasingly high and mental health wellness is devastatingly low. He or she is aware that community members and even congregants who have lived, worked, grown up, and worshiped in the area are inadvertently victims and may be unaware that they, too, are hurting after experiencing the anxiety, fear, and concern of imminent danger.

The pastor may have observed members in the community exhibiting post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental health issues related to prolonged and repetitive trauma. Further, the pastor perceives that their inability to identify these issues has contributed to the ongoing cycle of violent crime in their neighborhoods. This increases the burden of a vigilant pastor who

must now expand his or her cleric duty to encompass the role of a skilled counselor or social worker. Inevitably, there is contention and frustration when trying to be a transformational leader along with trying to satisfy what the church wants, what the community wants, and what he or she thinks God wants. Even if social work is a former or current job function, carrying out that kind of work is not entirely a part of the pastor's vision for community transformation. So, the pastor wrestles with the idea that I am a pastor, not a social worker. He also wrestles with wanting to initiate transformation rather than implement gentrification. However, historically, gentrification is what city leadership did to Black urban areas, and, subsequent throughout history, social work and community action are what Black urban pastors did.

The pastor may want to start from a place of his or her own vulnerability and loss. Sharing in community life, they are not exempt from the victimhood of gun violence. They may have been caught between gunfire, shot, or lost family, children, and friends. He or she mourns for their niece, nephew, or children as they deal with the loss of their friends, wishing it was something they could do in his or her parental power to shield these victims. However, even among victims and mourners, the pastor is elevated above the role of a mourner and is positioned to be the caretaker of others. There is no greater setting where the pastor feels most like an onlooker and outsider looking in than among family, where he or she is called out to give of themselves and meet the needs of others at the expense and neglect of their own.

Among the community respondents, the pastor is cognizant of the effects and impact of gun violence on himself. *I just baptized this young man. I was just spending time with these students at a school event. I just met his grandmother at an outreach event, and we were talking about this child while bagging up groceries. She just needed help.* However, the pastor is stifled

by the shame of crossing the boundary beyond what his or her church, community, or peers may accept as behaviorally appropriate for a pastor. Gun violence in the city is brutal and anguishing. Yet, by way of rarely spoken rules, there is a sense that the pastor must remain functional, sober, and emotionally stable amid tragedy, even repeated incidents of gun violence.

Such rules inflict much more anguish than violence; it is hard to know the impact of denying the pastor of his or her full personhood, the suffering that goes along with it, and the need for other-human comfort. What might it do to a pastor equally responsible for keeping the community going in the same way? The pastor does not want to deny other people their humanity. Still, he or she must dissuade the continuation of violence by keeping the community functional, sober, and stable in the same way. Fully aware that Philadelphians are brought up and built up tough for their own safety and protection, this furthers his or her convictions to love their community harder, to pursue them harder, and to create safe, welcoming spaces. The pastor believes that love is the only way to initiate change in the lives of young people and even adults who have grown cold, emotionless, and free of love and trust in the community. Still, to respect human dignity, the pastor must wrestle with the best way to offer his or her heart.

While the pastor enjoys connecting with the families and those suffering from gun violence, he or she often feels pressured to create the perfect vigil speech, a message, a program, something—anything—that will solve the community's problem. He or she knows that their voice is needed, expected, and calls for them to lead from the pulpit, at a vigil, in the hospital, in initiatives geared toward intervention and prevention, or at the policy level. The pressure makes them slightly unreasonable, wanting to make everything better in an instance because the

unyielding crisis has people frightened and angry. They are filled with negative, intrusive, and reactionary thoughts that do not suddenly disappear. Still, the pastor wants to have the right words to say at the moment that will dissipate the pain and painful memories. So, in desperation or with faith, the pastor wants to fulfill an expectation of having a presence and a presentation that will change his or heart part of the world. As the pastor toils with the words to say, time in preparation may consist of these thoughts: *“What will work? Why isn’t anything working? Why have things gotten worse? How do I make sense of this senselessness? What will answer the people’s questions?”* Given the traditional, historical, and professional guidelines, the pastor may experience a lack of freedom that allows the Holy Spirit to guide their work in gun-related ministry. Ministry expectations already overstimulate them, and the complexity of gun violence creates overwhelming and paralyzing concerns about where to start—what to do, how to do it, what to say, where to be, how to feel, and how to act. The pastor’s experience in light of gun violence is unsettling.

The Initial Phone Call. Even if the pastor does not know where to start, their involvement in gun violence usually begins with a phone call. He or she plays a critical role in the aftermath. Never mind gainful strides. The pastor is just trying to find firm grounding amid the feeling of being tossed around in this ever-looping cycle of violence. Concurrently, the pastor can support the families of multiple gun violence victims through distinct stages of bereavement or the aftermath of gun violence. Once the tasks of funeral officiating are complete, seemingly and without rest or a moment to exhale and decompress, the pastor is called upon to support another family through another gun-related tragedy.

Within a small window of time, the pastor is helping the family of a victim, the family of a shooter, and the family of a perpetrator who consequently became the victim—and it is not about keeping each family straight, being sure not to mix up each family or their situations. It is about the pastor, ensuring he or she is straight when walking into a room.

“You straight,” commonly a colloquial question of concern when one knows their peer is going through something disturbing, disruptive, or upsetting. There is not a guidebook, a strategy, or a formal way to carry out these surge-related tasks. Therefore, the pastor’s capacity to respond to gun violence is wrapped up in determining a successful path forward in rapidly changing conditions, navigating pertinent issues brought before them, and ensuring they are safe and well enough to lead in this precarious space. Given the mounting obligations, indeed, the pastor is not okay. Yet, he or she does not always get that needed check-in. As if instances of gun violence are not equally heartbreaking to the pastor, they must ensure that everyone else is okay, whenever, and wherever that first call from someone close to a shooting victim can take him.

The initial call can send the pastor rushing to the hospital, arriving just as other family members pull up, and receiving the news alongside them as emotions are high and raw. It is urgently necessary for the pastor to be a sobering voice and the voice of prayer. When arriving on the shooting scene, at the hospital, or at the first home visit, the pastor enters as the voice of reason, managing and embracing all the emotions of the people gathered there. He or she does what they can to ensure everyone present is okay, especially the angry people. The pastor does not want them to leave the same way they came.

The initial phone call can take a pastor to the shooting scene, where there is still confusion and distress even though the gunfire has ended. There is also a sense that these

moments after the shooting are only a brief time of peace talks. This shooting is short-lasting, and the pastor senses the lurking uneasy feeling of repetition or retribution. Despite that, the pastor must remain calm and foster a peaceful presence. Also, he or she feels tasked to demonstrate firmness and certainty towards the violence, declaring boldly that this, too, will come to an end. The shooting scene in front of their church makes the pastor double down on his or her vigilance and indignance. The pastors want to be consistent and handle gun violence in the same way. However, as the under-shepherd of the church, he or she feels a greater sense of obligation toward protecting his congregation and keeping them safe. The pastor understands that gun violence is the nasty community norm in their backyard; it hits close to home, affecting members living in the community. Yet, when gun violence reaches the church's property, it activates a hidden zero-tolerance policy within the pastor.

The initial call can take the pastor and the church into the community. Although the pastor is receiving the call, when he is she is put on notice, it forces the church to confront and handle the issue directly. The pastor may find it hard to connect and care for the community around a critical issue such as gun violence if his or her congregation is not currently involved in the community and hadn't already been building relationships around basic community needs. Hence, at the community level of engagement, the pastor may experience frustration associated with no snitching rules. Viewed as a caretaker, the pastor and congregation members are not received as co-mourners. Pastors are only permitted to meet immediate needs—providing a safe space to gather, offering prayer, and officiating the funeral. There is no welcome or cooperation when confronting issues that may satisfy a long-term need. When new to community engagement or re-engagement, the pastor must settle for being used the way the community wants to use him

or her until trust is built, or respect is earned. The pastor may have the humility and the patience to build community rapport. What gets tricky is balancing the rapport with both the community and the legal authority. They must think carefully about what their relationships reflect.

It is equally essential for the pastor to be in a relationship with the drug dealer, community offender, politician, and officer. However, he or she does not want to be looked at as a snitch. Nor do they want the police to think they contribute to community delinquency or perpetuate criminal activity. The pastor may experience envy or feel resignation regarding Muslim leadership. Admirably, it seems the Black Islamic community has naturally become a part of the everydayness of urban community life. The Islamic community is reflected in the urban community, while it is not easy to point out who in the neighborhood is a Christian or not when observing community life. This can often discourage the pastor as they, too, desires to gain and maintain respect from their neighbors, especially those involved in criminal activity. They want to find a way to get through to these groups of people or, at the very least, form connections that will facilitate community peace.

Gun violence can take the pastor to the home of the family. The pastor's response, more so his or her presence after the call, sets the tone for the family's grieving process. Some people are angry and want to retaliate after a loved one is injured or killed during a shooting. This requires the courage of the pastor to intervene. Sometimes, simply being present and silent with the family as they cried speaks volumes. When the victim is not a congregation member, the initial call employs the funeral home or family pastor to officiate the home-going service. In these cases, not only does the pastor has to accept the offer to officiate, but the congregation must assent to hosting the funeral. The pastor may already wrestle with the church and alleviate

nagging concerns about logistics and scheduling when deciding to host a non-member funeral. Their ministerial team needs to revise or develop an extended visitation schedule. Further funeral services, especially if the church is responding to multiple requests simultaneously, can bring drama and frustration. It is taxing on an older-in-age and voluntary staff, even if the pastor will be officiating at another host site.

In violent situations, however, the pastor must also mitigate concerns about congregational safety. *How do we know this person? What happened? What did he do? (Or boldly, “Why would someone does this to him if he hadn’t done something or been somewhere he hadn’t?”) Is there someone else they can call? Why can’t the funeral be held somewhere else? How do we know the shooters won’t come up in here? Did you tell the family, “No guns, no fighting, no trouble?”*—Church leaders and trustees want to know these things. Their curiosity reflects the entire congregation’s nervousness due to the threat of exposure to retaliation or consequential gun violence. As a means of comfort, the pastor presently supports the family as they make funeral arrangements. When the family is not from the church or is unfamiliar with the order of a traditional home-going service, he or she becomes more involved in the coordination and planning. Increasingly, the family will lean heavily on the pastor for other matters. Unintentionally, in a ministry setting where the pastor already carries out several distinct roles and jobs within the church, one funeral can significantly multiply the pastor’s duties, making him or her a coordinator, social worker, mediator, spokesperson, and officiant.

Although the pastor understands that familial distress impairs functionality and, in most cases, the family honestly does not know what to do, he or she is tired. And it has become a more cumbersome task for the pastor to remain the sobering, non-anxious presence throughout the

entire process when the pastor has not had sufficient rest and has neglected other basic human needs. What about if the pastor is bi-vocational and has another job outside the church? His or her pastoral career already runs overtime. Responses to gun violence not only run over the over-time, but it also creeps into other professional work and sometimes family life. *Ministry responsibilities reverberate across every aspect of the pastor's life, creating fuller schedules, the pressure of not having enough time in the day, and personal and familial disappointment. I must take off work on Thursday to officiate. Friday is my Sabbath, but that's the only day I have time for a funeral. If I leave the repast after offering the prayer, maybe I can make it to my daughter's recital or my son's game.* Still, while helping a family navigate a loss, the pastor overlooks areas of his life and family life that he or she is neglecting because they not want to miss something and rob the grieving family of a meaningful experience, healing moment, or closure.

Officiating a funeral is also a part of the job. Still, the pastor feels these moments, primarily when related to something plaguing the community, are pertinent to their call. He or she does not see the funeral as the end. Pastors convince themselves that if they do it right, it can be the source of beginnings—a reminder of the Christian's eternal life, an opportunity for community change, or the jumpstart to the family's healing process. This mindset is not free of obstacles. Foremost, on the funeral day, the pastor senses a scene change. His or her entire body knows that it is not a regularly scheduled service. Emotionally, the pastor experiences a different mood and pace than when he or she leads and participates in a traditional service. Despite being in the sanctuary—the church's holiest place, there is a lurking feeling of fear and retaliation catches up with the pastor. *Everyone, both victims and shooters, is together in the same space.* This triggers alertness in the pastor because “no one knows who is going to pop off first.”

Resiliency combats most of the pastor's negative feelings and intrusive thoughts. Still, the pastor mentally employs himself or herself as both the preacher of the hour and security. During the funeral, he or she pays attention to what everyone is talking about. The pastor also has an eye on the family. "Nothing is sadder" than witnessing the parent or the spouse seated in the first seat of the front row. Powerless, knowing he or she could not take the pain away, the pastor witnesses everything leading up to these moments during the funeral and knows that it will forever change the family. Therefore, even though the family is not paying attention and appears dazed and unfocused, the pastor experiences pressure to perform well and considers these precious moments.

During the service, the pastor facilitates the program, handles the participants, and stands with speakers. The team preparing for the repast has questions. A minister who knew the victim wants to know why they cannot sit in the pulpit with the program participants. The usher keeps sending the pastor notes. While the pastor is wondering *how I am going to handle all of this*, it's already his or her turn to speak. Conflicted by what he or she genuinely wants to say, it brings the pastor back to where they started—not knowing where even to begin. *What will stick? What will reach their heart?* Before the pastor knows it, he or she is finished, and the service is just about to end. Shortly after closing out the service, the church closes its doors. The church begins to get reset. The sanctuary is restored to its standard in preparation for its regularly scheduled services on Sunday. Seemingly, the pastor resets, beginning to feel normal, hoping to return to his or her usual self and ministry life again.

Surges of gun violence create a unique and seemingly on-call role since a phone call can happen any time and direct a pastor anywhere. The position is consistently overstimulating.

Physical workloads, alone, are enough to render the pastor anything but okay. There is no rest nor a break from the violence; gun violence is evidently perpetual and feels, instinctively, spiritual. If given the space for a sincere check-in on the pastor's safety, sanity, and security, he or she may admit, "Never would I have imagined my ministry being like this?" Privately, the pastor may experience a looping sensation that feels like a vibrant blend of grief, shame, and depression. Physically, it feels like he is running on a hamster wheel, trying to find the solution to a problem that does not have a foreseeable end. Although resilient against thoughts of quitting, the pastor may ponder, "Is this really my life?"

God and The Pastoral Call to Gun Violence. There is a sense of God directing the pastoral call to gun violence in all the places where gun-related ministry can take a pastor. The call can be lonely and burdensome on the pastor's heart, mind, and body, especially when he or she has to exhibit hope during hopeless situations and assert their faith when there is no way for anyone, even himself or herself, to see a positive change in the near future. However, the pastor's persistence in faith renders him most vulnerable to sightings of God. The pastor has stood witness to miracles where gunshot victims in critical condition live and do not die. He or she has found God in words they did not even know they had to say. God has revealed himself to the pastor in a sudden change of events, doctor's reports, and the sudden interest in the church or community to do their part in addressing gun violence in their community. The move of God never ceases to amaze the pastor; he or she is astonished every time. They are, physiologically, experiencing the sensation of surprise. It is a tingling feeling that reverberates from the bottom of the pastor's checks to his or her brain. It may seem to be interpreted as dizziness, but it is only emotional perplexity as their mind comes to terms with something inexplicable.

An “I can’t believe this” grin forms across his or her face as their mind reconciles itself to the miracle. The shock and the amazement still widen his or her eyes. Looking close enough, the eyes serve as a window to the inner workings of the pastor’s soul. His or her stomach is not as queasy as their soul has been lifted out of its rut. Their heart is even higher; it does not feel as heavy. The pastor feels it changing, but what is most shocking, possibly causing him or her to reach and touch the part of their body that is beating, isn’t that the pastor feels his or her heart changing. It is that they feel their heart; it is no longer depressed. It has feelings. Following suit, the pastor’s shoulders and the rest of their body begin to rise from the swelling of his or her chest with amazement. He or she feels like crying. God has done something for the pastor. Outwardly, it appeared that he or she was hopeless, insecure, downtrodden, and tired. It looked like it was over for the community; nothing could be done. The most substantial issue is that the pastor may have thought it was over for himself, as well. *I am not good enough. I haven’t done enough. I have failed.* Yet, God made a breakthrough in the pastor, creating a sense that He is beginning a good work within the pastor. Miracles build up ministerial confidence; it offers a glimpse of what can be accomplished and reminds the pastor to continue his or her efforts.

The pastor feels accomplished when participating in progressive activities, such as seizing opportunities to address unhealthy community norms or to educate and uplift others. The pastoral call gives the pastor the courage to pursue a relationship with community members when the congregation is no longer engaged in “outside of the building” ministry. Understandably, the uptick in violence has caused both the pastor and the congregation to reconsider how to evangelize and approach the door-to-door ministry. The pastor strives to impart hope, bring liberation, and demonstrate how faith and courage quails fear. He or she wants to bring together

the community, specialists, and other leaders, even if that means welcoming outsiders inside of the church to discuss critical decisions and outcomes for community change. The pastor also desires to address the brokenness and create windows of opportunity for people dealing with the guilt and shame of where they are from or what they have done. This is why the pastor comes to work—to bring healing to the church and the community around it. This is where he or she sees God, redeeming situations and acting on behalf of His people.

Firmly believing that a prophetic voice and solution are needed to address gun violence, the pastor also knows that their involvement is not about providing answers; it is about his or her efforts. That does not, however, stop them from contributing difficult and perplexing questions to discussions about neighborhood violence. *What are we to do African American officers are the ones harming, oppressing, and killing African American people? Why aren't you (another pastor) and your churches talking about gun violence if everyone else is? Why would we leave the community when our neighbors need us most? So, we will move over and move all of these people out to start over as if gentrification is the answer? I know you are all thinking about that shooting that happened outside of our church; would you like to talk about what happened?* The pastor speaks up about these concerns because they want the congregation to know that it should be an important concern for them, and it is for him, too. It demonstrates the importance of “not being silent.” The pastor does not feel his or her call is reserved solely for the sake of speaking out against gun violence but to call their congregation to action and involvement.

The most pressing portion of the pastor's calls is his or her duty to community children. When the pastor says they see God in his work with children, they are speaking about redemptive work and the presence of God as the Savior and our Hope for a future. The pastor is

progressively saving the lives of these young people. He or she observes young people as lacking mentorship and investment. Yet, he or she is unhesitant and optimistic with youth outreach. Despite enduring personal and community violence, youth still appear reachable, impressionable, and seemingly open to relationships with role models and positive parental figures. The pastor witnesses how preaching and programming changes and saves a child's life. He or she feels as hurt and regretful as a parent when a child chooses violence or loses their life. It is disempowering and devastating to the parent, pastor, and entire community when parents cannot shield their children from the atrocities of a violence-ridden community.

Children not from broken homes are also impacted because they are a part of the broken neighborhood and are subjected to environments lacking love, positivity, and self-sufficiency. Therefore, they adopt unhealthy means for resolving conflict and need resocialization. This stresses the pastor because he or she can feel things spinning out of control. It is the mental overwhelm of understanding where things went wrong but not knowing where to start to resolve and reconcile issues. *What will speak to the generation raising these children and encourage them to set a better example? How will I change the community outlook that criminalizes the black bodies of young people? How will I get the church to stop writing them off as knuckleheads and supply them with the courage not to be afraid of children in the community or deterred from helping them because he is offended by what they are doing? How do I wrestle with my own safety concerns when pursuing ways to intervene and interrupt teen violence? What will make these young people "get it?" How can I assure them I "get it" and truly see them, their hurt, and their losses?*

“Everyone is looking to me, and I am doing everything,”—In these moments, the pastor may feel helpless and inferior. He or she is also rushed. They may have attributed capitalism and commercialism to the neighborhood’s decline as it relates to gun violence. However, he or she overlooks how materialism impacts the community’s patience and how they judge the pastor’s work and results. Both the church and community members are impatient, wanting to see increased safety, progress towards the end of gun violence, decrease in mortality, etc., immediately as a result of the pastor’s initiatives without allowing time for these things to naturally and realistically occur in responses to the pastor’s work. There is also pressure for the pastor to show people that good things are happening through programs, public forums, and practical activities. This weakens the spiritual call and cheapens the prophetic voice of the pastor when people are looking for material progress and promotion as if spiritual occurrences—miracles and the move of the Spirit of God—are not real things. Further, capitalism has also impacted the profession’s integrity; the pastor is bitter of entrepreneurial pastors that are hoping to gain a name from the cause.

The dark side of ministry is that the pastor can become depressed, bitter, and jaded. He or she may be reluctant to admit it, but it is far worse in their emotional and mental state when others fail to acknowledge or recognize that their ministry can be complex and difficult. He or she often feels isolated and misunderstood because the people closest to them do not know what it is like for them to be a pastor. They want to help grieving families to recover from tragedy and find relief. The joy and satisfaction of his ministry are assisting people in living safe, victorious, and meaningful lives. Yet, they also need a place to refocus and heal. Nevertheless, the pastor finds relief for himself as the family walks him or her to the door after a home visit.

The pastor finds relief as they walk toward the exit of a hospital visit, knowing the shooting victim will survive their injuries. He or she also finds relief as they usher the last mourners out of the sanctuary and closes the church's front after a funeral (or repast). There's closure and the feeling of a weight being lifted during these exits. There is also a glimmer of hope for normalcy within the sigh of relief upon exiting and moving away from public scrutiny and requests. Even though the pastor feels called and mentally prepared to address gun violence in his or her community, their mind, body, and soul knows that these repetitive acts and gun-related deaths are not natural or normal. Privately, these instances haunt and agitate the pastor. Hence, the tasks that tire them also keep him or her up at night.

Phenomenological Agreement: Testing Reliability

The research is enhanced in qualitative studies by validation and reliability. Therefore, I shared the study's findings with the seven co-researchers and a new set of seven participants pastoring throughout the city of Philadelphia to solicitation of agreement around the phenomenon. The aim was to achieve validation and confirm reliability. Thus, participants were polled with the following question: "On a scale of 1 (incompletely) to 10 (in all respects), how fully do you resonate with this description of the lived experience of urban Black pastors facing the surge of gun violence?" Eighty-six percent of the invited participants responded. The average of all responses is a resonance score of 9.1.

Participant Feedback

The following are responses shared through feedback forms and follow up conversations. "My congregation does not want to leave the neighborhood, but many fear coming out at night,"

says a Southeast Philadelphia senior pastor who gave the general description a score of 8. Another former Philadelphia pastor gave a resonance score of 10. They shared, “I would have liked to read if any clergy interviewed had any grief and chaplaincy training to support their pastoral role in the communities that they serve that have or are experiencing gun violence. An associate pastor currently serving Germantown said, “Reading something that reflects our feelings, struggles, and challenges is refreshing. It makes you feel seen and understood.” The pastor gave a resonance score of 9.

One participant wanted the researcher to be aware that many young deaths are from accidental shootings. While accidental shootings were addressed in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), the general description greatly focused on intentional homicide since they occur at a higher rate. Another participant wanted to stress gender inclusivity as “many of today's churches are being pastored by women.” Chapter 2 also presents existing related literature particularized to women and their experiences. Overall, the study findings were received as good, informative, and “an excellent examination of what we see as an urban Black pastor.” Gratitude came with validation, as one participant shared, “While we know what we are signing up for, it is a good feeling to feel acknowledged in the process. The work is never done, however.”

Summary

This study brought together a diverse participant population through strategic sampling. The co-researchers were able to share conceptual perceptions relative to the research questions despite demographic diversity. Following the methodology (as explained in Chapter 3) allowed me to explicate collected data and generate a general description. The general description created a cohesive explanation of the phenomenon, detailing the lived experience of urban African

American pastors amid gun violence. In Chapter 6, I will discuss the findings of the study and present relative conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The sixth and concluding chapter brings closure to this phenomenological study by comparing the research findings with existing and related literature to further the understanding of the lived experiences of urban Black pastors. The chapter will focus on the role of pastors amid urban gun violence and conclude with follow-up recommendations and future research possibilities related to the research questions.

Key Findings

Research findings brought forth eight themes—Brokenness, Calling, Expectation, Full Authentic Selves, Germantown Today, God is Here, Gun Violence, and Relationships—as the co-researchers shared accounts of personal experiences of gun violence. The accounts depicted pastors in various roles such as a victim, first responder, caretaker, and co-mourner.

Pressured to Be Everything for Everybody

Pastor Royal shares with angst and frustration, “Everybody is looking at me and I am doing everything,” while discussing the complicated role of a minister. This admission represents an overarching and overwhelming experience for urban Black pastors. They experience the pressure and consequences of circumstances that require them to be everything for everybody every day. The co-researchers shared perspectives about the current state of Germantown, attributing the community’s increased and escalating violence to systemic racism. The “Germantown Today” theme captured perspectives on historical, current, and on-going conditions in the city, as well as community trauma exacerbated by what the co-researchers called the dual pandemic. The dual pandemic, inevitably giving pastors additional role, was described as the murder of unarmed Black men by police (which could no longer be ignored after

the public death of George Floyd) and the long-standing Coronavirus Disease 19. Such accounts detailed the harm done by gentrification, capitalism, and unjust systems that government leaders deliberately overlook. In turn, this furthered the deterioration of poor, urban communities within the city.

It is still considered a spiritual decision for pastors to take on the role of creating safe spaces or using their churches as supportive spaces that resolve neglected community problems. Community action is a part of their calling. It is hard to separate the urban pastor's call from their profession. An example of this was when a Germantown-born pastor, Richard Allen, led African Americans out of the Methodist Church (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Pastors feel divinely tasked with the responsibilities of serving their churches and pastoring the community. They are intentional about speaking up and standing up for the community and its concerns as well as loving those that are marginalized and unloved, including gun violence offenders. Hence, the "God is Here" theme reveals how they are motivated by Biblical texts and scriptures, empowered them to equip their congregations and communities with resilience, and given the courage to lead people through devastating and dangerous situations. The co-researchers found God in opportunities, particularly as a present help in their ministry and outreach to children who are predisposed to violence or other community ills. They received the greatest sense of call when engaging in programming and advocacy work. Pastors feel progressive and effective when leading initiatives that contend against gentrification, the displacement of long-standing community members, and the recurrence of violence in their city. However, they are aware that these responsibilities emerge when there is a lack of official

support to help people cope and address declines in the economy, education system, property condition, as well as health and safety within the community.

South (2021), Parham-Payne (2014), and Webster (2022) report on low government intervention that has consequently decreased safety and security in urban cities and perpetuated the outlook that illegal behavior and crime in areas, such as Germantown, are tolerated. However, the co-researchers found God and their calling amid the neglect. The co-researchers shared similar sentiments with Brunson et al. (2013), finding that partnering with city officials and police helps transform the community amid to gun violence. Admittedly, the co-researchers suffer anguish and disappointment when they have to step in where the government and school system has failed to step up. The literature informs us that the roles of Black pastors and the Black Church were birthed out of dire necessity. For instance, during the time of slavery, the enslaved Africans would run to wooded areas or other places to worship together discreetly (Pines, 2011). They created a space where they could find comradeship, encouragement, and equality free from the oversight of White Americans. Such spaces continued post-slavery and through Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement as a means for addressing the neglected needs of community members (Imani, 2020; Littlefield, 2005). Notably, after leaving the Methodist Church, Richard Allen, formed the Free African Society and provided practical support—financially, mentally, emotionally, and socially—to members of the community (Ncurrie, 2021). The city of Philadelphia, particularly Germantown, has its own history of neglect and community divestment which includes both a period of white flight and, presently, church flight. Consequently “there are still a small number of streets that are continuing to suffer” (South,

2021). Therefore, Black pastors and their churches continue to serve as a critical community resource in areas where people lack personal and institutional resources.

The traditional roles and responsibilities of pastors are embedded in trauma. These roles are responses to structural racism— expressed through neglect, divestment, capitalism, unmitigated violence, and lacked opportunities— across the United States (Imani, 2020; Hureau, 2022; South, 2021; Voison, 2019). In Southgate’s (2021) interview with Sarah Horsman, she advises that caregivers should not live in the permanent state of being overstretched. This would put pastors in a better position to respond to unexpected events. Yet, given all the urban pastor’s obligations, tasks, and responsibilities, how can they ever get to a place where they are no longer overstretched? The research found that pastors are overwhelmed by the seemingly insurmountable state of hopelessness in their city due to “see[ing] the bodies, the blood, the tears, and the hopelessness in the eyes of mothers and fathers,” listening to police commissioners that sound “hopeless,” and experiencing the depression and emptiness of busy areas “like [they’ve] never seen before.” These pastors may not be able to imagine a ministry where they are not overstretching, although they desire one.

Urban pastors are seeking physical and practical support as well as training as they carry out the roles of professional providers in areas of social work, education, law, and mental health. Many of the co-researchers recalled instances of separation and lack of cooperation from other community leaders and some faith leaders who did not understand the issues they faced with gun violence. The present-day workflow of “no breaks and no days off” stems from earlier Black experiences when the Black Church was all that people had. However, separation and lack of cooperation overstretches pastors and continues the tradition of passing-down the expectation

that Black pastors carry out multiple roles that others do not want to fill (Imani, 2020; Littlefield, 2005). Fortunately, there are activists and advocates in Philadelphia, such as Shane Claiborne (2021), who can work alongside Black pastors and their churches to help the community heal itself from within.

Collaboration is needed to determine the best strategy for ensuring poverty and poor community conditions in marginalized communities are addressed. Meeting physical needs is a path for providing opportunities to promote community resiliency and healing. Examples of activities that promote community resiliency and healing are faith gatherings that include prayer, services that offer opportunities for re-membering, and service projects that allow community members to actually beat guns into plow shears as foretold by the prophets Isaiah and Micah (Claiborne & Martin, 2019; Joel 3:10; Micah 4:3; Isaiah 2:4). For more resources from Philadelphia-based activists seeking to end gun violence, see Drick Boyd's (2021) recent article "The Role of Faith in Addressing Gun Violence: A Change of Perspective" and his chapter in *Spirituality in Higher Education*, "Weaving Activism, Faith, and Scholarship". He offers, from the perspective of someone with a different life experience, a unique take on advocacy and contributing meaningful and practical efforts to a cause such as gun violence.

Hiding and Holding Back True Feelings

Concealing vulnerability was a common experience for most of the co-researchers. They described their pastoral ministry as a profession where "eyes are always on me," "people are always watching," and "I feel like I am under a microscope." There is a preferred image of the Black pastor and the "Expectations" and "Full Authentic Selves" themes further revealed the pressures pastors navigate when accommodating multiple groups of people. Pastors experience

gun violence in the community as shared trauma because although the pastor has been affected by the same event, they are responding to it as a helper (Herman, 1992; Yoder, 2015). The pastor is there to render needed aid, to supply a shoulder for people to cry on, and to be the leader that co-suffers can lean on or look up to, and respond to community needs while suppressing their own. Suppression of emotions is not solely about time and place; it is about allowance. The Black Church still carries remnants of an “Other Worldness” faith and there is a core belief resonating through the church that “saints don’t cry” (Greenberg, 2004; Holden, 2021). Thus, the literature presented evidence that any sign of brokenness was not tolerated; it was considered weak, dishonorable, and unfaithful (Cheryl Woods-Giscombe, 2016; Payne, 2008).

Herman (1992) presented information regarding the punishment of soldiers who were considered dishonorable and weak after exhibiting signs of PTSD following their time served in the military. The surge of gun violence and shootings have created experiences for community members, including pastors, that liken the same impact of post-war soldiers. Unfortunately, it seems the way the military treated shell-shocked combat and non-combat soldiers is similar to the way the Black Church responds to the trauma of “warlike living conditions” in violent communities like Philadelphia (Aaron, 2021; Yoder, 2015). Holness (2022) reported that “church leaders involved in her ministry undergo emotional breakthroughs from attending therapy.” However, people, even pastors hesitant to reach out for help given the perceived consequences (ridicule, ostracizing, condemnation) for seeking support to cope with the hardship and violence that they experienced.

While sharing accounts, Pastors Royal and Harper broke down in tears realizing that they knew their trauma was there, but they had to continue to function as if it wasn’t because other

people were going through the same thing. Pastors Royal and Harper's admissions are a meeting point of the conflicting two consciousnesses (the victim and the first responder). Code-switching is required in a city like Philadelphia that prides itself on representation, the Philly mentality, and distinct territories. Co-researchers felt an additional splitting—a fluctuation between the two parts of themselves that are created when African Americans engage with a White-dominant society. Living a life of duality is an essential part of the Black American's legacy of trauma. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois (1903) said, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 2). When he says this, he is speaking about the struggle to balance the preservation of the African American identity while conforming to a White-dominant society.

The co-researchers celebrated the diversity of their community. Still, they felt a disconnection, disunity, and a lack of transparency. They perceived a need to censor certain perspectives and feelings about issues that largely impact Black Americans due to marginalization. It was described as though everyone in their diverse community is "playing nice" or "playing a part". Their perceptions of race caused them to feel as though they had to conceal authentic parts of themselves in mixed-race settings. There was also a shared concern about being able to express their frustration with inequitable systems and unjust laws or advocate for betterment and change without coming off as angry, aggressive, or threatening to White people. Further, the co-researchers felt a need to keep secrets and conceal what happens in

private (away from the White-eye) so as not to disgrace, dishonor, or create negative perceptions about the Black community (Cook et al., 2017; Holness, 2022; Parham-Payne, 2014). Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health. Safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives (van der Kolk, 2015).

Co-researchers described the plight of being Black in America—which is a full-time experience—and their concerns with articulating pain and disgust in mixed-race settings. Pastor Royal desires and needs to be as “Black as [they] want to be.” It is a big deal to them to be able to freely share their feelings in a way that does not offend people of other ethnicities and genders. Yet, the freedom to be uncensored and unapologetically Black is of greater importance. For centuries, African Americans have been violently and systemically oppressed, and treated as if they were subhuman or superhuman in order to justify these actions (Boehm, 2010; Parham-Payne, 2014). Couldn’t suppression of one’s true Black self be the fruit of dehumanization and racism, as well? van der Kolk (2015) says, “As long as you keep secrets and suppress information, you are fundamentally at war with yourself. The critical issue is allowing yourself to know what you know. That takes an enormous amount of courage” (p. 235). Pastors need spaces that are open and dedicated to learning about the Black experience and listening to how it impacts their ministry and calling. Alexander Evans’ (2022) “Guns, Grief, and Longing for God’s Grace” and Sabra Robison’s (2016) article “A Widow’s Perspective on Grief in the Black Church” can provide additional insights into pastoral experiences with grief and create space for deeper discussion and learning.

The co-researchers stressed that they also need communities where they can commiserate and engage in social action. Herman (1992) discussed the impact of rap groups in helping

soldiers overcome their trauma and PTSD. A few of the co-researchers expressed interest in dedicated “rap groups” to discuss gun violence with their peers and the effect it has on their psychological or physiological health. Per a few of the co-researchers’ accounts, there aren’t any groups of the sort that they are aware of in Philadelphia. Such groups can be empowering and encouraging. They also provide safe spaces for pastors to embrace vulnerability and discover who they are without the fear of judgment or shame. The findings show that it is frustrating and painfully isolating to pastors that people “have no idea” what they are going through. These groups could also bring awareness to some of the people—White Americans, their congregations, and external stakeholders—who are not aware of what urban Black pastors experience on a consistent basis. Awareness can reduce stigma and may also help people acknowledge the most appropriate (and often ignored) context for gun violence. It can bring the true face of gun violence, “a young black boy in an alley,” and the devastation and impact the violence has on urban settings to the forefront (Gusterson, 2013).

Developing a New Self

The emergence of the “Brokenness” theme identified auto-pilot as a numb work mode for pastoral leaders. Auto-pilot is a form of workaholism and a sign that pastors are turning trauma energy onto oneself (Yoder, 2015). There is an expectation for clergy to have all the answers, per the accounts of the co-researchers. Also, there is a notion that they can keep everything together with limited resources (Cheryl Woods-Giscombe, 2016). An African American survival technique is to remember that their struggle is much bigger than the individual and focus on the strong legacy of survivors and faithful people who were not broken by people, circumstances, and atrocities that were meant to break them (Imani, 2020). This is the thread of the Black

Church to which Black pastors can draw (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994). Thus, the co-researchers explain that in the moment of trauma “it is not about [them];” it is about the people that are in pain. Similarly, Sarah Horsman shares that clergypersons are able “take a deep breath” and then push through the trauma (Southgate, 2021). Through experience, pastors have acquired the skillset of suppressing their feelings in order to provide clear, comfortable, and actionable direction to those that are in need. Yet, the findings further exposed the immense strenuous labor that is put onto the pastor’s body with little regard for what it does to them emotionally, physically (both brain and body), and psychologically.

Shootings and related deaths traumatize and overwhelm residents and direct victims along with the pastors (and other first responders) who show up to help. The consequence of prioritizing so many others and being pulled in too many directions given all the competing priorities is that pastors hold a lot of unaddressed traumas. The added toll on their already stressful life situations has created situations where pastors are frozen, powerless, trapped, and resigned to the shame of not knowing where to begin or how to approach gun violence. Hence, auto-pilot is a work function that is not sustainable.

There is an indication that pastors are already feeling powerless, intimidated, and incapable of acting and responding to such a critical community crisis. The accounts of co-researchers highlight insecurity and intimidation when addressing gun violence. Their seminary education or relevant training opportunities did not focus specifically on gun-related issues nor did it fully equip them for urban ministry. Most felt they were at a disadvantage due to limited direction and resources for navigating individuals and families through trauma although they were able to incorporate skills gained from previous professions. Pastors may not realize that

unaddressed trauma has caused them to feel this way and possibly, overwhelmed, or burnt out. Findings demonstrate a need for balance between work and rest so that the pastor has more time in his or her life for self-care and mindfulness. While many of the co-researchers shared that they do not have time to cope, a couple shared that they did not know how to cope or what to do anymore, in order to cope. The lack of time for the pastor to cope or even recognize what is happening to them personally has limited their opportunity to acknowledge health issues and take steps to treat them.

Descriptions of the brokenness associated with gun violence uncovered the pressures for clergy to fake a faith that “[at] that moment, they do not have” amid gun violence. This exposes a critical unmet need—proper direction and guidance on how to care for the community as well as themselves through crises. Pastors need support on what care and self-care look like for themselves, their congregations, and the community when dealing with trauma and gun violence. Honoring a pastor’s needs is dignifying, and when the dignity, humanity, and well-being of the pastor are honored, he or she can thrive in all areas of their life and ministry. This is possible through addressing knowledge gaps and training needs that make urban Black pastors feel insecure, alone, misunderstood, under-resourced, and insufficiently supported. They need a good means of coping with gun violence and need to trust that people who are different are not a threat to their well-being. Great examples of building trust are opportunities to co-exist in the same context with leaders of other faith traditions and healthy models for ecumenical ministry efforts. For instance, an inter-generation, inter-racial, and inter-faith nonprofit organization that supports the collaboration of faith leaders through most parts of the city known as P.O.W.E.R.

Philadelphia pulls together to address community issues such as gun violence. Another example would be experiences that allow the clergy to openly suffer with the community.

The findings revealed that comfort and healing can be found immediately and in the moment of crisis, and pastors want to be a part of it. They want to engage personally in the healing process, mindful that it needs to happen in a way that honors the esteem of their position as pastor and does not interfere with their ability to lead others through suffering. For instance, pastors would like to experience more situations where it doesn't make sense for them to "fake it." In most situations, they cannot shudder or cry in the face of extreme tragedy but must maintain composure. Therefore, upholding the esteem of the position of the pastor should not be the minister's responsibility. What would it be like or how would it enhance our healing communities if a pastor could show up as their true self—a co-victim? Works such as *Black Theology and Black Power* by Black Liberation Theologian Dr. James H. Cone (2018) and *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by the Brazilian Philosopher Paulo Freire (2020) can help pastors focus on their entire personhood, specifically, what has been suppressed or lost. These works afford persons an opportunity to explore this topic from a theological lens even though it goes beyond the scope of this paper to develop it further on these pages.

Undoubtedly, historical and structural racism helped fashion the present-day role of the pastor. Many co-researchers shared that they were justice seekers; eradicating racism that marginalizes and impoverishes urban and minority communities was just as important, if not essential to, ending gun violence. However, there's a need for the Black Church to address the pain of historical trauma and racism. Pastors need to consider how that pain impacts their current role and the role of Black churches. There are so many pressures that pastors endure today that

are not seemingly relevant for this time, such as making a way out of no way or living up to the expectation of being everything for everybody in every way necessary (Boehm, 2010; Imani, 2020; Littlefield, 2005). Instead of carrying the torch of, “Black pastors and their churches have always done it that way,” an honest conversation that names racism as the problem and then explains “why they had to do it that way” may bring closure to roles and activities that keep pastors overstretched and overwhelmed. It can also replace feelings of suppression with feelings of liberation and relief. That’s a bold and ambitious decision to make, requiring professional support because it forces the church to address unprocessed pain and could change and challenge the identity of the church and the black pastor. The works of Nigerian British-born clinical psychologist and author, Taiwo Afuape (2012)—*Power, Resistance, and Liberation in Therapy with Survivors of Trauma*, and her recent publication with Kerry-Oldham (2022), “Beyond Solidarity with Black Lives Matter”— can provide valuable resources on re-membering and resilience through the lens of liberation.

Applicability and Implications of the Findings

The co-researchers shared deeply about their lives and the results revealed the side of pastors that stays hidden and invisible, particularly, the expectations and circumstances that motivate them to conceal their vulnerability and pain to convey faith and strength. Suppression offers a false promise that time will heal their wounds. Instead, as noted in the candid accounts of the co-researchers, it causes trauma to work itself out within the body. Along with changes in their mental well-being, the pastors also dealt with gut health issues, headaches, body aches, and unexplainable pain in various parts of their bodies. These are known as psychosomatic issues which trauma survivors usually develop (Herman, 1992; Herman, 2002; Tedeschi, & Moore,

2016). Resiliency, on the other hand, can allow pastors to flourish in their communities.

Therefore, this section seeks to build an understanding of resilience in place of suppression.

Resiliency remains a staple of the Black experience and African Americans are widely credited for being able to push through pain and suppress emotions to overcome difficulty. This often made them feel as though they had to neglect, protect, and suppress parts of themselves. African Americans willingly fulfill the expectation of being resilient, long-suffering, persevering and preserving, successful, and possessing unlimited strength. It is a badge of honor to uphold such a standard. However, the literature shows that some of these perceptions regarding Black strength and resilience that African Americans carry are rooted in racist models (Boehm, 2010). For instance, a widow shared that she was shamed and asked to toughen up when she publicly grieved her husband (Cheryl Woods-Giscombe, 2016). Her public display of emotion did not align with the image of the strong Black woman, an image of Black people that justified slavery and became more refined through the post-slavery Black maid (Boehm, 2010).

Just as survival mode and auto-pilot kick in when it no longer needs to, suppression is not adaptive in all situations, especially when it seems pastors can easily withdraw or disassociate during times when it is most appropriate to be present with the community—at a vigil or with a grieving family. A part of trauma recovery is becoming familiar with and embracing the [trauma] one holds in their body (Herman, 1992). There are pastors with childhood trauma. Imagine a child dealing with triggers daily from unprocessed trauma and then growing up to become a pastor where he or she must suppress emotional and physical sensations associated with personal unprocessed trauma and grief in order to put the needs of others before his or her own. Sadly, that is the lived experience of a couple of the co-researchers. The co-researchers shared that they

were experiencing generational trauma and that they were the product of a community that was subjected to unfair and inequitable treatment. Suppression and ignoring past trauma are not an appropriate depiction of resilience. Yet, the “unspoken rules of the Church” that tell a pastor that they must put their own pain aside to support the mission of the Church, set a professional standard and a spiritual precedent that “this is what resiliency means.”

Spirituality can be used to convince others to neglect their body, implicitly and explicitly (Southgate, 2021). Faith can be a means for encouraging someone to “get over” their trauma, even if the threat persists. It could mean, “This too shall pass. So, ignore it and do not complain about it,” as if resiliency requires blind forgiveness. Similar theological perspectives and understandings of resiliency have also shamed people into thinking that seeking help or therapy is sinful or offensive (dishonoring or an embarrassment to the Black legacy). The pressure to execute the pastoral role perfectly along with confronting and addressing every other community need effectively can be overwhelming, especially when limited with time to recover from trauma or recharge and reflect after walking someone through a difficult circumstance.

Resiliency is not an auto-pilot work mode or the tendency to always “be on the go”. It is important for pastors to assert boundaries when navigating competing priorities. Setting boundaries can be a difficult task because it goes against the norm of a pastor’s typical “no breaks and no days off” workflow. Therefore, resiliency should be paired with mindfulness training. Mindfulness makes it possible to survey our internal landscape with compassion and curiosity but can actively steer people in the right direction for self-care (van der Kolk, 2015). Reflecting allows the pastor to identify and name the problem. It also creates opportunities for the pastor to name the problems in his or her community.

Similarly, to Boehm (2010), Cheryl Woods-Giscombe (2016), and Walker-Barnes (2014), Christine Bethell defines resiliency as “the ability to remain calm when faced with a challenge” (Miller-Karas, 2022). It is one’s ability to jump back, per its “Latin *resilire*,” or bounce back after adversity. Transformational resiliency goes beyond recovery and bouncing back. It is a process of “moving well beyond previous levels of functioning while holding the pain of trauma” (Bethell, 2022). Therefore, pastors can turn tragedies and events that change the community into opportunities for everyone to grow stronger. Moving forward does not have to be reliant on a person bouncing back to their former selves. Instead, the person can develop a new self that is equipped to face new challenges in an ever-changing world (Herman, 1992). This requires professional assistance from a mental health professional as well as an element of health education so that the Black community begins to understand what trauma resiliency is. For instance, the surge of gun violence, the unexpected Coronavirus pandemic, and the unprecedented murder of George Floyd increased the amount of trauma that pastors were exposed to on a consistent basis, lessening the time to cope or regroup. Pastors can reduce distress and improve resilience during times of crisis (with the support of professional help) when they take time out to “name the problem” and tend to pain and suffering, including their own.

Pastors have a unique advantage in communities; they can name problems publicly through various platforms other than their pulpit. They also have a unique resource—a safe gathering place for others to find solidarity, face the problem with support, and persist in rising above it. These unique advantages allow pastors to bring the community together through shared trauma for a time of storytelling, “re-membering,” and remembering. Re-membering and

remembering are means of restoring the individual and community. It also leads to reconnection or, as Pastor Jody describes it, “a re-membering” (bringing back together) of the body (Herman, 1992). Bewley (2014), Makant (2012), and Sutherland (2017) discuss re-membering experiences spanning spirituality, transformation, Black lives in the digital age, and women. These specialists provide unique perspectives essential to rebuilding individual and communal resiliency. Further, Tedeschi and Moore (2016) illustrate the concept, of resiliency by comparing it to the rebuilding of a city’s infrastructure. Likewise, an individual must also rebuild and build up his or her core beliefs and understanding of what it means to survive and thrive in the world. In light of gentrification (a quick and easy city transformation process), rebuilding is a long and arduous process. Hence, Bethel (2022) describes the process of building resilience to be a purposeful choice.

Contrary to notions that “saints don’t cry,” Boehm (2010) explains that resiliency is not happiness or contentment, nor does it not seek to make people content and at peace with unsafe and poor living conditions in marginalized communities. It is a commitment to make a way out of no way and to push forward despite injustice. Resiliency recognizes that things are not normal, even if they do not have the means to address them. Black people have faced a lifetime of trauma (Boehm, 2010; Holness, 2022; Imani, 2020; South, 2021). One writer, Collier (2013), believes that these intentional systems that create tragedy within Black communities are seemingly beyond repair. Fortunately, transformational resilience does not mean people have to ignore the brokenness of the world or how a broken world breaks down people and relationships. Therefore, pastors can adapt to the “Philly mentality,” accepting things that they cannot control while, per South (2021) and Webster (2022), recognizing the clear links between systems and

unsafe communities in Philadelphia which have created conditions where people have demonstrated failure to thrive.

Pastors won't be overwhelmed by the seeming impossibility of bouncing back from such conditions. Instead, they can help the community name the problem. For example, they can identify the government as the chief culprit for allowing such systems to persist (Collier, 2013). Naming the problem then allows them to grieve any losses and accept how they have been changed by the circumstance. Transformational resilience further empowers the individual or community to realize how they have been made new with new strengths for new challenges. Hopefully, the community will find the courage to confront their offenders. McClintock (2019) suggests that protest is a part of this healing process. The government should be called to repentance and repayment for the injustice accosting Black communities because it will take new systems and an increase in financial aid to begin to create safe spaces in urban settings. There also needs to be financial support that addresses the ongoing trauma in Black communities, or at the very least the finances needed to help support the new identity of the community and improve the resiliency of critical community leaders such as pastors. Transformation is a long-term community initiative, requiring the support from a variety of leaders across sectors within the community and at state and federal levels.

Limitations of Research Findings

Findings were limited by ability, purpose, and design. It is impossible to approach something completely without personal judgments, biases, and interpretations (Peoples, 2021). However, I used a process called bracketing to the best of my ability the utmost integrity in uncovering this phenomenon. The purpose of the study was to add to the knowledge of the Black

Church by presenting Black pastors' lived experiences in a truthful, unfiltered, and real way (Southgate, 2021). Therefore, it does not provide a plan or solution for ending gun violence. (See Recommendations for Future Studies) Also, qualitative studies are limited in generalization even if tests for reliability brought positive results. The study focused was on a specific area—the Germantown Section of Philadelphia—and cannot be used to represent the experience of every urban Black pastor across the United States.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study focuses on the needs of local pastors and the pain and trauma they carry. Future studies can build on this work by broadening the resources and partnerships pastors need to overcome the hardships associated with their urban ministry, specifically as it relates to gun violence.

Healing and Change for Everyone

The members of urban churches also need help addressing gun-related trauma. A similar study can help congregations acknowledge their hardships, providing more findings that can help produce resources for the Black church—both clergy and congregations—to work through unaddressed and overlooked trauma and grief. Herman (1992) would suggest that even though there is no reparation for a pastor's previous suffering, they are in a position where the atrocities they have faced can be transcended and used as a gift to others. When a pastor finds healing and stability for themselves, they can help lead others out of suffering. Therefore, future studies can equip pastors who find their own healing and stability to offer what they have learned during their process as resources. Such studies can explore how pastors can help co-victims heal and

grow from their experiences and develop support for addressing historical and structural trauma that has shaped the profession of the pastor and functions of the Black Church today.

Studies should also analyze if existing resources are applicable to Black people. This can be accomplished by taking core principles that have been proven to be effective solutions to nationwide community issues and particularizing them to Black communities. For example, Brene Brown is renowned for her teachings on resiliency and vulnerability. However, she is critiqued for having “a huge gap in her work—race” (Yazeed, 2023). Decker et al. (2018) stresses evaluation for effectiveness. The reliability of theories, principles, and solutions needs to consider sample sizes (the inclusion rate of African Americans) and its outcomes in Black communities.

The greatest outcome of relevant studies is the impact it can have on Black pastors and the Black Church. Such outcomes provide both pastors and churches an opportunity to develop a new identity. In turn, this can create opportunities for others to shed harmful and burdensome identities—schemas of the angry Black man, strong Black woman, and dangerous youth. Resources such as Elaine Miller-Karas’ (2023) *Building Resilience to Trauma* can assist pastors (natural community leaders) and trained mental health professionals in achieving much-needed change and regeneration for the Church along with desired experiences of transformation and a new life and future (Joel 2:25; Philippians 3:13-14) for the pastor. This is an audacious and courageous task that may not happen on a national level but based on each church’s readiness to address the pain of historical and structural trauma, this can be addressed locally or through individual churches.

Professional Help Regarding Physical Safety

Anxiety, PTSD, and paranoia are serious conditions that can impact someone's life if the trauma is not addressed. However, the physical health of urban community members is an imminent threat and a critical basic need. Threats to physical safety due to gun violence are just as much an injury science problem as it is a psychological and social issue (Bonnie et al, 1999; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Injury science focuses on the prevention of injuries based on the understanding that injuries are not "random, unavoidable occurrences, such as accidents or acts of God, nor are they untoward consequences of human malevolence or carelessness" (Bonnie et al., 1999). Rather, the field contributes a perspective that makes injury preventable by identifying and framing interventions for a broad array of risk factors and its tools for measuring outcomes. The daily threat of gun violence averages four to five victims a day. Thus, there needs to be more emphasis and initiatives that allow professionals in Medical Science to intervene and contribute to the preventive efforts that enhance physical safety.

The research findings showed that pastors recognize a need for a long-term strategy that addresses conditions that result in gun violence. Yet, they advocated for programs and partnerships that could bring urgent solutions and stop gun violence immediately. In light of this, future studies could carry out projects that implement a "basic needs first" policy using evidence-based, coalition-driven initiatives that have already been proven to be effective solutions. van der Kolk (2015) describes post-traumatic stress as a condition where someone presently organizes their life based on something traumatic that happened in the past. "The body continu[es]," he says, "to defend against a threat that belongs in the past" (p. 53). Yet, threats of gun violence are being fulfilled in real-time. By first achieving a physical sense of safety and reducing the ongoing trauma in the city, community members will have better mental health outcomes.

Final Thoughts

This phenomenological study observed how gun violence is experienced by urban Black pastors. The findings suggest that pastors have a variety of unmet needs, regarding their physical safety and mental well-being. There's a demand for the development of curricula to equip, train, and motivate ministry leaders to engage in gun violence work. Providing the pastor with the necessary help, attention, and care ensures and increases their effectiveness in helping others through community crises. Personally, it creates possibilities for them to escape loneliness and invisibility and allows them to live full, resilient lives. To accomplish this, pastors need time and judgement-free spaces to be vulnerable and heal from their trauma—privately with other pastors and in public settings with members of their church and community. There is still much work to be done. However, the most pressing priorities for urban Black pastors navigating this surge of gun violence are to re-envision their new selves—the new role they will play in the community—and to partner with other professionals to advocate and implement physical safety-first initiatives.

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APPENDIX A- RECRUITMENT LETTER TO CO-RESEARCHERS

To: [Church Name]

From: Krystl D. Gauld, Doctor of Theology Candidate – Evangelical Seminary

Subject: Intent to interview your congregation's pastor

Date: April 1, 2022

Dear Rev. [Pastor's Name],

My name is Krystl D. Johnson. For the past two years, I have been your neighbor, serving as the Executive Director of Dignity Housing. Also, I am a Doctor of Theology candidate at Evangelical Seminary in Myerstown, Pennsylvania. I am researching the experiences of urban African American clergy who are pastoring through the surge of gun violence in the city of Philadelphia. **And I would like for you to participate in the study!**

I hope to uncover the essence of pastoral ministry with particular attention to experiences of gun violence. I am seeking ministry leaders that are willing to explore at a deep reflective level their own personal experiences with gun violence, with particular interest in these main areas: (1) first hand-accounts from Black Pastors in Philadelphia; and (2) what ministry has been like with regard to gun violence in the city. This research will add to the body of knowledge about urban African American clergy and their experiences within the communities they serve. Also, it could potentially assist with greater awareness and increase the interest of academic institutions in studying the church's response to gun violence in urban areas.

I have attached a consent form and the research questions for your review. I intend to hold these interviews between April 19 and May 6, 2022. I can accommodate your schedule if needed. If you have any questions, I can be reached at 856-974-4560 or by email at Krystl.johnson@evangelical.edu.

Thank you,

Krystl Johnson

Attachments:

- Consent Agreement Form for Study Participation
- Interview Questions- The Semi-structured Interview Guide (Co-Researcher's Version)

APPENDIX B- CONSENT AGREEMENT FORM FOR STUDY PARTICIPATION

March 28, 2022

Consent To Participate In A Research Study

Title:	The Lived Experience of Urban African American Pastors as it Relates to Gun Violence: A Study of Five Blocks in Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Researcher:	Krystl D. Johnson Doctor of Theology Candidate Restorative Theology- Trauma & Transformation Phone: 856-974-4560 Email: Krystl.johnson@evangelical.edu
Advisor:	Janet Stauffer, Ph.D., LMFT Kairos University Doctor of Theology Program Phone: 717-865-0496 Email: jstauffer@kairos.edu
Source of Support:	This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Restorative Theology at Evangelical Seminary.
Purpose:	You are invited to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the lived experience of urban African American clergy in Philadelphia who are pastoring through the surge of gun violence. You will be asked to participate in an interview. Your experiences will be the topic. The Zoom interviews will be a 90-120- minute semi-structured, face-to-face meeting and a 30-minute follow up interview. The interviews will be audio and video recorded as well as transcribed.
Precautions:	I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. The risks may include emotional discomfort created from discussed experiences with gun violence. I understand that I may contact the researcher if I should need or want a referral to a mental health professional as a result of my participation. Other risks are not expected than those encountered in everyday life. This study is not affiliated with any other group, and no one will know you are participating other than the researcher. Any co-researcher will be renamed, with the option of selecting their own pseudonym, so that the identity of any participants will not be disclosed.
Benefits:	This study of African American pastors in Philadelphia offers first-hand accounts and a look into the lives of urban Black pastors dealing with gun violence. Such studies are the beginning steps to research needed to support pastors and assist the Christian Church in addressing gun violence through the Black congregations serving urban communities impacted by gun violence.
Compensation:	Participants will not be compensated in any way. However, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.
Confidentiality	The information in this research will be held confidential by the researcher. All research materials (written and any flash drives of recorded files) will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. When the videotaped and audiotaped discussion parts of interviews are transcribed, the researcher will remove all

identifying material (denomination, church name, streets) about participants and any individuals that participants discuss. Final data that is reported will be drawn from the transcriptions without identifiers. Audiotapes and videotapes will be deleted immediately after the research is completed.

Right to Withdraw: You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw at any time.

Summary of Results: A summary of the results or a copy of the dissertation will be supplied to you, at no cost, at the completion of the research. If you feel that any of your questions are not answered adequately, you may contact the researcher's advisor, Dr. Janet Stauffer at 717-865-0496 or jstauffer@kairos.edu.

Voluntary Consent: I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may contact Krystl Johnson by phone at 856-974-4560 or by email at Krystl.johnson@evangelical.edu, or Dr. Janet Stauffer at 717-865-0496 or jstauffer@kairos.edu.

I grant permission for the data to be used by the researcher in the process of completing her doctoral program focusing on Trauma & Transformation at Evangelical Seminary, including within the dissertation and within other publications in the future.

Participant's Name

Desired Pseudonym

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

**APPENDIX C- INTERVIEW QUESTIONS- THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW
GUIDE (CO-RESEARCHER'S VERSION)**

Intended Participants: Philadelphia area pastors

Interview setting: Zoom

Topic: How are Black Pastors Facing the Surge of Gun Violence in Philadelphia?

INTAKE QUESTIONS

Title & Name		Gender	
Date of Birth		Years in Ministry	
Church Name		Years Served Church	
Do you live in the neighborhood?			
Do most of the congregants live in the area?			
Any seminary training or equivalent?			
Other specialties and degrees?			

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The lived experience of being a black pastor in Philadelphia

1. Can you describe for me using three sensory words what it is like for you to pastor in the city of Philadelphia?
2. Tell me about the block where your church is located.
3. Can you give me an example of the role you play in the following:
 - a. The prevention of gun violence?
 - b. The midst of gun violence?
 - c. The aftermath of gun violence?
4. Similar studies reported pastors stated their only role is to present the gospel. What does that mean?

Experiences With Ministry Area Gun Violence

1. Have you recently been called to respond to gun-related homicide? If not, can you recall a time when you had to respond to a gun-related homicide?
2. Philadelphia is experiencing a surge of gun violence. Can you give me one specific example of what these experiences might be like?

[During this time, there will be two additional questions, allowing an opportunity to share the details of a gun related homicide.]

The Pastor's Faith

1. What is faith like in the middle of all of this?
2. How does your theology inform your response to gun violence?
3. Considering the rise of gun violence in Philadelphia, where is God for you in all of this?
4. Can you share, in light of gun violence, what your ministry journey has been like?

Pastoring All

1. Think of a time when you had to support the family of the shooter and describe that experience in as much detail as possible.
2. Is it different or more difficult than conducting a home visit for a victim?
3. Do you experience these city shootings to be isolated events or something else?
4. Can you share about a time when you suffered with the community due to gun violence?

Intervention & Relief

1. Considering the pulpit, the polls, rallies, and relationships with police, can you tell of a time when you used a platform recently to speak up about gun violence?
2. Think of a time when you lead a funeral for a shooting victim. Can you describe for me the inside of the sanctuary on the day of the funeral?
3. Can you describe for me three of your greatest needs as an African-American pastor serving in the city of Philadelphia during this surge of gun violence?

[During this time, there will be an additional question, allowing the opportunity to share the details of gun-related legal proceedings, shooting retaliation, community responses, and hospital visits.]

Conclusion

Are there any other comments that you would like to offer to this research study?

**APPENDIX D- INTERVIEW QUESTIONS- THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW
GUIDE (INTERVIEWER’S VERSION)**

Intended Participants: Philadelphia area pastors

Interview setting: Zoom

Topic: How are Black Pastors Facing the Surge of Gun Violence in Philadelphia?

INTAKE QUESTIONS

Title & Name		Gender	
Date of Birth		Years in Ministry	
Church Name		Years Served Church	
Do you live in the neighborhood?			
Do most of the congregants live in the area?			
Any seminary training or equivalent?			
Other specialties and degrees?			

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The lived experience of being a black pastor in Philadelphia

- 1) Can you describe for me using three sensory words what it is like to pastor in the city of Philadelphia?
 - a) You share the word/phrase _____. I’d like for you to describe what that feels like?
- 2) You mentioned _____; can you describe that in more detail?
 - a) I want to go back to another word/phrase you used- _____. What does that feel like?
 - i) You mentioned _____. Can you describe that in more detail?
 - (1) I find what you said about [this] interesting. Can you give me an example of [this]?
 - b) The third word/phrase you shared was _____. Can you describe this in more detail?
 - i) You mentioned [this]. Can you tell me what you do when you [this]?
 - c) Tell me about the block where your church is located.
 - (a) If I were standing outside of your church, what would I see, hear, smell?
 - (2) You’ve probably had some interesting experiences as a pastor serving in this area, can you recall any of them?
- 3) Can you give me an example of the role you play in the following:

- a) The prevention of gun violence?
- b) The midst of gun violence?
- c) The aftermath of gun violence?
 - i) Similar studies reported pastors stated their only role is to present the gospel. What does that mean?
- 4) Can you give an example of what it means to preach the gospel in the face of death/gun violence?

Experiences With Ministry Area Gun Violence

- 1) Have you recently been called to respond to gun-related homicide? If not, can you recall a time when you had to respond to a gun-related homicide?
 - a) Who called you? In what capacity? What was your role?
 - i) Can you walk me through what that experience was like for you?
- 2) You mentioned that you did _____. Had you had formal training prior to that? And if so, did you employ what you had learned?
 - a) Thinking back on that time (whether employed training or not), what was that like for you?
 - b) Philadelphia is experiencing a surge of gun violence. Can you give me one specific example of what these experiences might be like?
 - i) You mentioned _____. How are you handling that?
 - (1) How do you think people expect you to respond in light of how you want to respond?
- 3) Can you walk me through what that experience of [name the example] is like personally?
 - a) [Go back to the gun-related homicide] You mentioned earlier that [pick out an event]. Can you share more details about what happened?
 - i) What did you see or hear?
 - (1) Were any of your other senses activated?
 - ii) How did time flow?
 - iii) How did you experience others?
 - iv) How did you experience yourself?
 - (1) You mentioned _____ what did that feel like?
 - v) Did you take away any meaning from the situation?
 - (1) Was there any significant objects tied to this event?
- 4) [Continue to build onto the event] What was it like when _____?
 - i) You mentioned _____ can you describe that in more detail?

Pastoring All

- 1) Think of a time when you had to support the family of the shooter and describe that experience in as much detail as possible.
 - a) What was that phone call/notification from the family like?

- i) You mentioned _____. How did that make you feel?
- b) How do you think people expect you to respond in light of how you want to respond?
- c) I found this interesting: _____; could you tell me more about that?
 - i) What did the home visit feel like?
 - (1) Can you describe the inside of the home?
 - (2) What were the people like (with one another) and how did you experience them?
 - (3) Is it different or more difficult than conducting a home visit for a victim?
 - ii) Did you offer subsequent support? What was family communication like thereafter?
- 2) Is there a difference between how a pastor serves the victim's family and the shooter's family?
 - a) Can you give a specific example of that?
 - i) Thinking back to that time, what was that like for you?
- 3) What else might emerge in response to a gun-related homicide? Can you give a personal example of that?
 - a) We discussed earlier that the gun violence in Philadelphia had been classified as a surge. Do you experience these shootings to be isolated events or something else?
 - i) What other experiences intersect your experiences of gun violence?
- 4) Can you share about a time when you suffered with the community due to gun violence?
 - a) You mentioned _____. What happened?
 - i) How did you personally experience the trauma, victimization, or loss?
 - b) Describe for me how your personal experience informs your work.
 - i) You mentioned _____. How does that impact your experience with others when responding to victims, shooters, and their families?

Intervention & Relief

- 1) Considering the pulpit, the polls, rallies, and relationships with police, can you tell of a time when you used a platform recently to speak up about gun violence?
 - a) What did that mean for you?
- 2) Think of a time when you lead a funeral for a shooting victim. Can you describe for me the inside of the sanctuary on the day of the funeral?
 - a) What did you see and hear from where you are sitting during the service?
 - i) What other senses were activated?
 - (1) What about when you were standing at the pulpit? How is that a sensory experience?
 - (a) How did time flow?
 - (i) You mentioned _____ what did that feel like?
 - (b) How did you experience others?
 - (c) What did you say? What did you preach? What couldn't you say?
 - (i) Thinking back to that time, what was that like for you?
 - (d) Did you take away any meaning from the situation?
 - (i) Was there any significant objects tied to this event?

- 3) I'd like you to walk me through a series of events:
 - a) If you ever experienced gun-related legal proceedings or cooperation with police, could you describe in detail what happened?
 - i) What was the suffering like for you personally and corporately?
 - ii) How were your faith and 'as expected' responses as a minister challenged?
 - iii) Where did you experience comfort, relief, and intervention?
 - b) If you ever were concerned with shooting retaliation or participated in efforts to ensure retaliation prevention, could you describe in detail what happened?
 - i) What was the suffering like for you personally and corporately?
 - ii) How were your faith and 'as expected' responses as a minister challenged?
 - iii) Where did you experience comfort, relief, and intervention?
 - c) If you ever participated in a vigil, rally, or protest in response to gun violence, could you describe in detail what happened?
 - i) What was the suffering like for you personally and corporately?
 - ii) How were your faith and 'as expected' responses as a minister challenged?
 - iii) Where did you experience comfort, relief, and intervention?
 - d) If you ever made a hospital visit for a shooting victim/their family, could you describe in detail what happened?
 - i) What was the suffering like for you personally and corporately?
 - ii) How were your faith and 'as expected' responses as a minister challenged?
 - iii) Where did you experience comfort, relief, and intervention?
- 4) Can you describe for me three of your greatest needs as an African-American pastor serving in the city of Philadelphia during this surge of gun violence?
 - a) Can you describe what those three words feel like?
 - i) You mentioned this _____ as one of your greatest need, is that correct? [If not, ask what one of the greatest needs are.] Can you give an example of when this need was met? What happened?
 - ii) Can you describe what it was like and what it meant for you?

Conclusion

Thank you. Are there any other comments that you would like to offer to this research study?

APPENDIX E- INVITATION LETTER TO PASTORAL FEEDBACK

To: [Church Name]

From: Krystl D. Gauld, Doctor of Theology Candidate – Kairos University

Subject: Intent to interview your congregation's pastor

Date: March 1, 2023

Dear Rev. [Pastor's Name],

My name is Krystl D. Johnson and I am a Doctor of Theology candidate at Kairos University. I am researching the experiences of urban African American clergy who are pastoring through the surge of gun violence in the city of Philadelphia. **And I would like for you to participate in the study as a peer reviewer!**

The aim of the study was to uncover the essence of pastoral ministry with particular attention to experiences of gun violence. I have concluded the research study which resulted in a general description of the lived experience. Now, I am seeking ministry leaders that are willing to deeply reflect on the description as it relates to their own personal experiences with gun violence. Your feedback is critical and will add to the body of knowledge about urban African American clergy and their experiences within the communities they serve. Also, it could potentially assist with greater awareness and increase the interest of academic institutions in studying the church's response to gun violence in urban areas.

Participation Details:

Here is the link to participate in the study: <https://form.jotform.com/230536712794056>.

Participation consists of three parts: a brief intake section, reading of the General Description (attached), and two follow up questions.

The General Description has been attached for you to read. The estimated reading time is between 40 - 60 minutes and it is recommended that the description is read in one sitting. I will be accepting responses until Sunday, March 18, 2023. I can accommodate your schedule if needed.

If you have any further questions, I can be reached at 856-974-4560 or by email at Krystl.johnson@evangelical.edu.

Thank you,

Krystl Johnson

Attachments:

- The Review Document

APPENDIX F- THE REVIEW DOCUMENT

Intended Participants: Urban African American Pastors

Interview setting: Online via Gun Violence Study: The Lived Experience of Urban African American Pastors (jotform.com)

Topic: Is this the experience of urban Black pastors facing the surge of gun violence?

INTAKE QUESTIONS

Title & Name		Gender	
Date of Birth		Years in Ministry	
Church Name & Address		Years Served Church	
If a Philadelphia Area church, what section?			
Do you live in the neighborhood?			
Do most of the congregants live in the area?			
Any seminary training or equivalent?			
Other specialties and degrees?			

FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

1. On a scale of 1 (incompletely) to 10 (in all respects), how fully do you resonate with this description of the lived experience of urban Black pastors facing the surge of gun violence? https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_b-kVfeZhsD_mmi5GAq3tEOUVD4jr_p/view?usp=share_link
2. Are there any other comments that you would like to offer to this research study?